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Modern Theories of Consciousness and the Elusiveness of Subjectivity

Moderní teorie vědomí a nezachytitelnost subjektivity

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PROHLÁŠENÍ

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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KEYWORDS

consciousness, subjectivity, objectifying thinking, unobjectifiable, subject-object dichotomy, cognitive closure

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

vědomí, subjektivita, zpředmětňující myšlení, nezpředmětnitelné, rozštěpení na subjekt a objekt, kognitivní uzavřenost

ABSTRACT

This diploma thesis is concerned with the question of the right conceptual approach towards consciousness. It opens up with the thesis that the crucial characteristic of consciousness – its subjective aspect – is profoundly elusive. To understand the nature of this elusiveness we get a loose inspiration from Karl Jaspers (of the continental tradition) and his idea of "subject-object dichotomy" whose main point is a realisation that the conscious subject is in principle unobjectifiable and can never be properly grasped by objectifying thinking. This main idea is then applied to various modern theories of consciousness (coming from the analytical tradition) in order to explore and demonstrate to what extend each of the theories misses or acknowledges the specific irreducibility of consciousness to objectively describable phenomena. Thus we observe that J. J. C. Smart omits subjectivity from his identity theory altogether since he understands reality as objectively graspable in all its aspects. Colin McGinn comes with an interesting explanation of our problems with grasping consciousness as part of the physical world and asserts that we are "cognitively closed" with respect to the solution of the mind-body problem. However, he concludes that a possible solution delivered in objectifying terms exists in principle and could be accessible to minds superior to ours – thus the elusiveness of subjectivity is overlooked once again. David Chalmers seems to be on the right track: he realises the fundamental irreducibility of the subjective aspect of consciousness and proposes a view according to which consciousness should be simply accepted as one of the fundamental parts of reality. However, it is John Searle who very succinctly expresses where the reason for this irreducibility is rooted. He comes close to the idea of subject-object dichotomy thanks to his conception of ontological subjectivity and his criticism of Cartesian concepts. We follow his reflections by an attempt to explain where our tendency to force objectifying concepts on consciousness comes from. Referring especially to Noam Chomsky and Colin McGinn and their ideas about the relationship between language, our intellectual capacity and "cognitive closure" we come to the conclusion that we naturally think in objectifying terms and construct our view of reality from object-like symbols, metaphors and models. A concept of consciousness which would do justice to its elusive subjective aspect thus cannot fit our usual and bounded view of reality. The only solution to this predicament seems to be the acknowledgement of the fact that objectifying thinking is not the only possible way in which we access reality. By realising the situation of subject-object dichotomy we are open to a view that the ultimate reality in its unity is neither subjective nor objective and is accessible only through an act of transcendence which escapes any objective or empirical treatment. Changing our concept of consciousness thus goes hand in hand with an acknowledgement of the possibility of a more intuitive and incommunicable aspect of being.

ABSTRAKT

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá otázkou správného konceptuálního přístupu k vědomí. Začíná tezí, že klíčová charakteristika vědomí – jeho subjektivní aspekt – je výslovně nezachytitelná. Pro porozumění povahy této nezachytitelnosti se volně inspirujeme Karlem Jaspersem (z kontinentální tradice) a jeho myšlenkou „rozštěpení na subjekt a objekt", přičemž jejím hlavním bodem je uvědomění, že vědomý subjekt je v principu nezpředmětnitelný a nikdy nemůže být uspokojivě zachycen zpředmětňujícím myšlením. Tato hlavní myšlenka je pak aplikována na různé moderní teorie vědomí (vycházející z analytické tradice) se záměrem prozkoumat a demonstrovat do jaké míry každá z těchto teorií přehlíží nebo uznává specifickou neredukovatelnost vědomí na objektivně popsatelné fenomény. Zjišťujeme, že J. J. C. Smart subjektivitu ze své teorie identity úplně vynechává, protože chápe realitu jako objektivně zachytitelnou ve všech jejích aspektech. Colin McGinn přichází se zajímavým vysvětlením našich potíží s chápáním vědomí jako součásti fyzikálního světa a tvrdí, že jsme „kognitivně uzavřeni" vůči řešení problému propojení mysli a těla. Na druhé straně ale dochází k závěru, že řešení založené v zpředmětňujících termínech v principu existuje, a mohlo by být dostupné myslím nám nadřazeným – nezachytitelnost subjektivity zůstává tudíž opomenuta. Zdá se, že David Chalmers jde správným směrem: uvědomuje si fundamentální neredukovatelnost subjektivního aspektu vědomí a přichází s pohledem hlásajícím, že vědomí by mělo být jednoduše akceptováno jako jedna z fundamentálních součástí reality. Je to ale až John Searle, kdo výstižně identifikuje kořen zmiňované neredukovatelnosti. Blíží se myšlence rozštěpení na subjekt a objekt díky své koncepci ontologické subjektivity a kritice karteziánských konceptů. Navazujeme na jeho úvahy pokusem vysvětlit, odkud naše tendence podřídit vědomí zpředmětňujícím konceptům vlastně pochází. Odkazujíc se zejména na Noama Chomskeho a Colina McGinna a jejich myšlenky týkající se vztahu jazyka, našich intelektuálních schopností a „kognitivní uzavřenosti" přicházíme k závěru, že je pro nás přirozené myslet v zpředmětňujících pojmech a konstruovat náš pohled na realitu ze symbolů, metafor a modelů založených na objektech. Koncept vědomí, který by učinil zadost jeho nezachytitelnému subjektivnímu aspektu, tudíž nezapadá do našeho běžného a omezeného způsobu vidění reality. Jediným řešením této obtížné situace se zdá být uznání faktu, že zpředmětňující myšlení není jediným možným způsobem přístupu k realitě. Díky uvědomění si situace rozštěpení na subjekt a objekt se otevíráme názoru, že vrcholná realita ve své jednotě není ani subjektivní, ani objektivní a je dostupná jedině skrze akt transcendence, který uniká jakémukoli objektivnímu či empirickému přístupu. Změna našeho konceptu vědomí tak jde ruku v ruce s uznáním možnosti více intuitivního a nesdělitelného aspektu bytí.

CONTENTS

1 Introduction

Consciousness is the most basic and obvious fact about our lives. It is so obvious that most of the time we completely forget about it. Consciousness is like glasses on our nose, only much closer. It is infinitely close, immediate, always with us. This is the very reason why it is so immensely hard to grasp it or to even talk about it properly. This immediacy and obviousness of consciousness is an undeniable clue to the fact that we need to completely change our usual ways of thinking in order to approach the phenomenon in such a manner as to do justice to it. This task is undeniably very tricky indeed.

One of the aims of this thesis is to show that modern theories of consciousness coming from analytical tradition tend to fail in their attempt to tame consciousness and find a place for it in objectively described world. For if we set a task to find a place for something in the whole of reality we first need to know what the nature of this reality actually is. Most of the conceptions of consciousness come with an unreflective view of reality as completely describable in objective terms and this seems to be the crucial obstacle standing in the way of seeing the real character of consciousness – the elusive subjectivity. By realising that the subjective aspect eludes objectifying approaches we will become open towards completely changing our concept of consciousness.

The first step in our attempt to find a new possible view of seeing consciousness and its subjectivity as a part of reality is to properly expound what is meant by the idea that subjectivity is elusive. For this purpose I turn to thoughts of an existential thinker: my inspiration comes from Karl Jaspers and his concept of *subject-object dichotomy*. Even though it might seem confusing to confront two radically disparate traditions I believe that radical shift in thinking is what is really needed here. Each of the two traditions provides us with specific tools for viewing the world and I don't see any reason why we shouldn't at least attempt to use the best of both perspectives, provided that we keep in mind that the inspiration remains loose enough in order to allow us to actually reveal the common ground which has to be the reality in its ultimate unity. We are all part of the same reality, the same ultimate unity of being, thus even apparently completely different views of it have to be understood as in a way complementary.

After introducing the new way of looking at subjectivity I will attempt to demonstrate on various theories of consciousness that each of them to a different extent either misses or comes close to the idea of elusive subjectivity. Then I will attempt to

reveal the crucial reason why it is so hard for us to identify the root of the mind-body problem. This has to do with the nature of our cognitive capacity - our tendency to cling to objectifying thinking. By realising that we are cognitively closed towards grasping all aspects of reality without distorting them we will be encouraged to change our approach radically and get inspiration from views which are open towards acknowledging our deepest incommunicable intuitions.

The main aim of the thesis is not to solve the mind-body problem or to find a place for consciousness in the world; rather, its aim is to show that we need to rebuild our concept of consciousness. This goes hand in hand with realisation that there are other ways of being connected to reality than via objectifying thinking and that to acknowledge this means to transcend the usual everyday and unreflective view of reality towards the unobjectifiable which is, after all, much closer to us than anything else we can possibly think of.

2 The Idea of Elusive Subjectivity

One of the main steps I need to take before pointing out the crucial problems of modern theories of consciousness is to introduce the concept of elusive subjectivity. I need to show what I mean by the claim that the concept of subjectivity should be radically different from the other concepts we have. In order to attempt this I will start by referring to Karl Jaspers' idea of *subject-object dichotomy* (*Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung*).

Jaspers believes that any attempt to grasp the whole of reality in objective terms is destined to fail.[1] His explanation of this thesis is based on his conception of being. Being is to be understood as the ultimate unity which transcends everything partial.[2] We practise unwarranted reductionism whenever we try to grasp the unity using objectifying thinking – this basically amounts to an attempt to convey an account of the whole of reality in terms of one partial aspect of being.[3] In Jaspers' own words:

"*Thus we find a great number of metaphysical attitudes, which have been known as materialism (everything is matter and mechanical process), spiritualism (everything is spirit), hylozoism (the cosmos is a living spiritual substance), and so on. In every case being was defined as something existing in the world, from which all other things sprang.*

But which then is the correct view? Through thousands of years the warring schools have been unable to demonstrate the truth of any one of them. In each view some truth is manifested, namely an attitude and a method of inquiry which teach men to see something in the world. But each one becomes false when it lays claim to exclusiveness and strives to explain all existence."[4]

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[1] THURNHER, Rainer, Wolfgang RÖD and Heinrich SCHMIDINGER. *Filosofie 19. a 20. století*. Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2009, 523 p. ISBN 978-80-7298-177-9, p. 230.
[2] Ibid., p. 229.
[3] Ibid., p. 231.
[4] JASPERS, Karl. *Way to wisdom: an introduction to philosophy*. Translation by Ralph Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954, 208 p. ISBN 03-000-0134-7, pp. 28f.

"Man sieht so eine große Reihe von Weltanschauungen, die man mit dem Namen Materialismus (alles ist Stoff und naturmechanisches Geschehen), Spiritualismus (alles ist Geist), Hylozoismus (das All ist eine seelisch lebendige Materie) und unter anderen Gesichtspunkten benannt hat. In allen Fällen wurde die Antwort auf die Frage, was eigentlich das Sein sei, gegeben durch Hinweis auf ein in der Welt vorkommendes Seiendes, das den besonderen Charakter haben sollte, aus ihm sei alles andere.

Aber was ist denn richtig? Die Begründungen im Kampfe der Schulen haben in Jahrtausenden nicht vermocht, einen dieser Standpunkte als den wahren zu erweisen. Für jeden zeigt sich etwas Wahres, nämlich eine Anschauung und eine Forschungsweise, die in der Welt etwas zu sehen lehrt. Aber jeder wird falsch, wenn er sich zum einzigen macht und alles, was ist, durch seine Grundauffassung erklären will." JASPERS, Karl. *Einführung in die Philosophie: 12 Radiovorträge*. München: Piper, 1971, 131 p. ISBN 3-492-10013-9, p. 24.

As I understand it, Jaspers is trying to say that our usual ways of thinking are incapable of representing the ultimate reality in its unity which encompasses within itself all its different aspects. We always end up missing one or another essential aspect. Jaspers provides an explanation as to why this is so. The answer dwells in a state of affairs that is inseparable from our life situation – it is the so-called *subject-object dichotomy*:

"*All these views have one thing in common: they apprehend being as something which confronts me as an object, which stands apart from me as I think it. This basic phenomenon of our consciousness is to us so self-evident that we barely suspect the riddle it presents, because we do not inquire into it. The thing that we think, of which we speak, is always something other than ourselves, it is the object toward which we as subject are oriented. If we make ourselves into the object of our thinking, we ourselves become as it were the Other, and yet at the same time we remain a thinking I, which thinks about itself but cannot aptly be thought as an object because it determines the objectness of all objects. We call this basic condition of our thinking the subject-object dichotomy. As long as we are awake and conscious we are always involved in it. Twist and turn as we will we are always in this dichotomy, always oriented toward an object, whether the object be the reality of our sense perception, whether it be the concept of ideal objects, such as numbers or figures, or whether it be a fantasy or even an impossible imagining.*"[5]

We are directed outside towards the objects and we take this state for granted. We don't think about the ultimate source of our ability to have any objects at all. Even when we realise that we are the subject of all our experiences and thoughts, we can never see this fact in a way we see everything else. We can only point to it, without grasping it fully. Subjectivity is unobjectifiable, it will always remain what it is and never turn into some

[5] Ibid., pp. 29f.
"Allen diesen Anschauungen ist eines gemeinsam: sie erfassen das Sein als etwas, das mir als Gegenstand gegenübersteht, auf das ich als auf ein mir gegenüberstehendes Objekt, es meinend, gerichtet bin. Dieses Urphänomen unseres bewußten Daseins ist uns so selbstverständlich, daß wir sein Rätsel kaum spüren, weil wir es gar nicht befragen. Das, was wir denken, von dem wir sprechen, ist stets ein anderes als wir, ist das, worauf wir, die Subjekte, als auf ein Gegenüberstehendes, die Objekte, geriditet sind. Wenn wir uns selbst zum Gegenstand unseres Denkens machen, werden wir selbst gleichsam zum anderen und sind immer zugleich als ein denkendes Ich wieder da, das dieses Denken seiner selbst vollzieht, aber doch selbst nicht angemessen als Objekt gedacht werden kann, weil es immer wieder die Voraussetzung jedes Objektgewordenseins ist. Wir nennen diesen Grundbefund unseres denkenden Daseins die Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung. Ständig sind wir in ihr, wenn wir wachen und bewußt sind. Wir können uns denkend drehen und wenden, wie wir wollen, immer sind wir in dieser Spaltung auf Gegenständliches gerichtet, sei der Gegenstand die Realität unserer Sinneswahrnehmung, sei es der Gedanke idealer Gegenstände, etwa Zahlen und Figuren, sei es ein Phantasieinhalt oder gar die Imagination eines Unmöglichen." pp. 24f.

kind of object. We are rarely aware of it, and when we are, we are baffled by this strange abyss which accompanies us in every moment of our waking, conscious lives.

Jaspers draws a conclusion from what has been said about the *subject-object dichotomy*: the ultimate being is neither subject nor object, but it has to encompass both poles – it has to be "das *Umgreifende*"[6].

In my opinion, the most important observation Jaspers comes up with is the fact that it is utterly problematic to grasp the subjective aspect of our experiences. Whenever we perceive, think or dream, there is something going on in our mind. Endless arrays of various objects inundate our consciousness. It seems that those objects are everything there is. Jaspers notes that being, when it is *grasped*, always becomes determined as some object, so what we usually encounter is objectiveness as such.[7] However, we also realise that we are here as subjects and it doesn't matter how hard we try, we will never manage to turn the "I" completely into object – I always stay here as the one for whom I have become an object. Being of the object (*Objektsein*) and being of I (*Ichsein*) are radically different ways of being.[8] There is also a third way of being - being in itself (*Sein an sich*). It is being of things independently of their being an object for a subject. I can never reach being in itself since I always make it into my object and thus into an appearance (*Erscheinung*). I am different from this being of things because I know that I am; I am for myself.[9] Thus there are three poles of being: being of object (*Objektsein*), being in itself (*Ansichsein*) and being for myself (*Fürsichselbstein*). They cannot be thought of as existing beside each other; rather, they are inseparable poles of being.[10] So again we encounter the idea of being as something irreducible to one aspect. I will return to it in the last chapter of the thesis.

For now I will focus on the *subject-object dichotomy*. This basic situation of our conscious life leads us into a kind of blindness with regard to the real character of

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[6] JASPERS, Karl. *Einführung in die Philosophie: 12 Radiovorträge*, p. 25.

[7] "Sein wird als erfaßtes sogleich ein bestimmtes Sein. Auf die Frage, was Sein sei, bietet sich uns daher *vielerlei Sein* an (...) mit einem Wort: Gegenständlichkeit überhaupt. In der Situation vorgefundenes Sein *ist* für mich *Objekt.*" JASPERS, Karl. *Philosophie: I. Philosophische Weltorientierung*. Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 1956, 340 p. ISBN 978-366-2427-910, p. 4.

To better understand these passages from *Philosophie* I also used an unofficial Czech translation by Václav Němec, Ph.D. which he provided in handouts for a course on existential philosophy in 2011.

[8] "Wie *ich* mich auch wende, mich zum Objekt zu machen, immer bin auch ich da, dem ich Objekt werde; es bleibt ein Ichsein. *Sein als Objektsein* und *Sein als Ichsein* sind die zunächst sich aufdrängenden wesensverschiedensten Seinsweisen." Ibid., pp. 4f.

[9] "Das Sein der Dinge weiß nichts von sich; ich, das denkende Subjekt, weiß von ihm. (...) Dieses Ansichsein aber ist mir nicht zugänglich, denn im ersten Zugriff mache ich es zu einem Gegenstand, damit aber zur Erscheinung als einem Sein für mich. Ein Sein, das für sich selbst ist, in dem Sein und Gewußtsein zusammengehören, kenne ich nur in mir." Ibid., p. 5.

[10] "Wenn ich das Sein auflöse in Objektsein, Ansichsein und Fürsichselbstsein, so habe ich nicht drei nebeneinander bestehende Seinsarten, sondern die voneinander unlösbaren Pole des Seins, in dem ich mich finde." Ibid.

subjectivity – its elusiveness. We are used to being directed towards objects. Objects, from their definition, are always standing against some subject (thus *Gegenstand*). They are the entities which make up the content of consciousness, be they external objects or only imagined products of our minds. Since we often speak about the "content" of consciousness it might seem as though the subject or consciousness were some kind of "container". However, this only shows our inability to think in other than objective terms. We always have to think some objects, it is impossible to think anything else.

That is why we can never properly grasp subjectivity itself. We are the subjectivity and we can never stand against ourselves. We are like a flashlight which will never shine on itself. Yet flashlights are objects as well, so we miss the point again. Is there subjectivity after all? We are so close to it that we cannot deny that. We are the subjectivity. But that is all we can really say about it. As soon as we try to describe the subjective pole, we transform it into object of sorts. This is what we do all the time and we should fully realise it before we start inquire into questions concerning the place of consciousness in the world.

I believe that it will be useful to keep the idea of *subject-object dichotomy* in mind while turning to analysis of the other accounts of consciousness. Jaspers' conception identifies the most crucial aspect of subjectivity which is being overlooked too often by the modern analytical thinkers[11]. The subjective pole seems to be too close for us to actually realise that it is there. When we talk about the "first person view" or about "what-is-it-likeness"[12], we *hint* at the fact of subjectivity. However, none of the concepts really *grasps* the essence of subjectivity. That's why it is so common for these ideas to be discredited by deeper inquiries. My aim in the following chapters is to reveal the inadequacy of the usual conceptualisation of consciousness and to propose an alternative way of looking at the subjective. This alternative treatment of subjectivity can be found in ideas of various thinkers (even in analytic tradition, namely Searle, whose conception I will discuss later) and it seems to me that its potential to reveal why we have such problems with solving the question of consciousness has not yet been fully appreciated.

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[11] I don't mean to say that the idea systematically eluded analytical tradition. For example, Wittgenstein puts it quite succinctly in his *Tractatus*: "5.632 The subject does not belong to the world but it is a limit of the world. 5.633 Where in the world is a metaphysical subject to be noted? You say that this case is altogether like that of the eye and the field of sight. But you do not really see the eye. And from nothing in the field of sight can it be concluded that it is seen from an eye." WITTGENSTEIN, Ludwig. *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. London: Kegan Paul International, 1922, 189 p., p. 151.

[12] See NAGEL, Thomas. What is it like to be a bat?. *The philosophical review: [a quarterly journal]*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1974, Vol. 83, No. 4, pp. 435-450.

It may seem at first sight that applying Jaspers' concept of *subject-object dichotomy* to the analysis of the consciousness debate in analytical tradition is rather strange. However, I believe that we need such a radically stated concept to help us change our usual way of thinking. It will help us focus on different parts of the mosaic, so to say. We can refine our reasoning later, but first we need to restate the question and look at the problem from a brand new perspective.

3 Applying the Idea of Elusive Subjectivity

The aim of this chapter is to confront various modern theories of consciousness with the concept of *subject-object dichotomy*. This should help us to explore the new point of view that we adopted in the previous chapter and to find out how it could possibly help us in determining why some of the modern theories seem so unsatisfactory in explaining the place of consciousness in the world.

I have chosen four theories which differ in their acknowledgment of the predicament concerning our inability to capture subjectivity in objective, scientific terms. They exhibit a certain range, from disregarding the subjective almost completely to coming very close to Jaspers' own account. Seeing each theory from the point of view of *subject-object dichotomy* should help us show that this new perspective can provide us with valuable insights into the problematic and lead us on our way to a possible new solution.

3.1 Subjectivity Reduced

I have decided to introduce J. J. C. Smart's classic account of consciousness as an example of an approach which seems to ignore the subjective aspect of consciousness altogether. In his article *Sensations and Brain Processes* Smart suggests that conscious sensations are in fact nothing but brain processes: "*Why should not sensations just be brain processes of a certain sort?*"[13]

Smart is convinced that there is no reason to think that anything we encounter in the world should be excluded from the category of physically explainable phenomena: "*That everything should be explicable in terms of physics except the occurrence of sensations seems to me to be frankly unbelievable.*"[14] He expounds his conception further by noting that he doesn't want to claim that the terms "after-image" and "brain-process of sort X" have the same meaning. He only puts forward an idea that as reports of some process they happen to be reports of the *same process* – namely a brain process. What I find very interesting is his following statement:

[13] SMART, J. J. C. Sensations and Brain Processes. *The philosophical review: [a quarterly journal]*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1959, Vol. 68, No. 2, pp. 141-156, here p. 144.
[14] Ibid., p. 142.

"*It follows that the thesis does not claim that sensation statements can be* translated *into statements about brain processes. Nor does it claim that the logic of a sensation statement is the same as that of a brain process statement. All it claims is that in so far as a sensation statement is a report of something, that something is in fact a brain process. Sensations are nothing over and above brain processes.*"[15]

If we are looking for something being reported, and if that something has to have *character of an outer object*, then all we are left with is the brain process. However, as Smart himself observes, sensation statements have a logic which differs from the logic of statements about brain processes. Under the influence of the concept of *subject-object dichotomy* we could restate the claim as follows: logic of statements referring to the subjective aspect differs from logic of statements referring to objects.

I think that it is fair to ask whether the above mentioned observation about the different meanings of the two types of statements doesn't actually point to something which should be explored more deeply. We should not ignore any such symptom if we really want to do justice to the acknowledgement of the problems we face while trying to capture the character of subjectivity. However, Smart doesn't seem to find the logic difference problematic. He goes on to stress the identity of sensations and brain processes and introduces the concept of *strict* identity:

"*When I say that a sensation is a brain process or that lightning is an electric discharge, I am using "is" in the sense of strict identity. (...) I do not mean just that the sensation is somehow spatially or temporally continuous with the brain process or that the lightning is just spatially or temporally continuous with the discharge. (...) I distinguish these two senses of "is identical with" because I wish to make it clear that the brain-process doctrine asserts identity in the strict sense.*"[16]

It seems that according to Smart it is impossible for us to actually report exclusively our sensation, or, to be precise, its subjective aspect. At the same time we always refer to something objective, something out there in the material world, namely a brain-process. It is not right to think of our sensations as something "over and above" brain-processes, so whenever we mention our subjective experiences, we necessarily refer to an actual,

[15] Ibid., pp. 144f.
[16] Ibid., p. 145.

objective, material brain-process. Once again, Smart is willing to admit that reports about sensations and reports about brain-processes do not have the same meaning (this seems to be connected to the problem of logic difference mentioned earlier). He compares this to a case of referring to "the Evening Star" and "the Morning Star". Even though the meanings differ, both terms actually designate the same object, something material out there in the world.[17]

It is certainly true that when we want to connect every report to something objective and material, we must end up with the conclusion that sensations must in fact be brain-processes. On the other hand, I believe that our being able to distinguish various meanings points to a certain specific dimension of our conscious experience. Smart's example with the Morning star and the Evening Star might be misleading. While using the name "Morning star" we may mean some particular celestial body being observed under some specific, but still objective circumstances (i.e. specific time, namely morning). After-images, however, are not some objective bodies being observed, they are the actual results of observations which belong on the subjective side. They are not some material object out there in the world, as in the case of the Morning/Evening Star. If they were, they would only be some special case of observing brain-processes under specific, *objective* conditions. The crucial problem is that the specific conditions which influence the meaning in this case are not fully *objective*.

Let me explain it more thoroughly. If the difference between the meaning of "after-image" and "brain-process X" was of the same kind as the difference between the meaning of "the Evening Star" and "the Morning Star", then an after-image would have to be a brain-process observed under some specific *objective* circumstances, e.g. at a certain time or something of the sort. However, we may look into the brain in every possible way we can imagine but we will never come across the actual, *subjective* experience of an after-image. The meaning difference in this case is much more radical than in the case of celestial body observation. It does not depend on the change of some objective circumstances under which the observation is being made. The difference between the meaning of "after-image" and "brain-process of sort X" dwells in the fact that they are connected to two different aspects of our conscious lives – objective and subjective.

Introspection plays a crucial role here. In the course of replying to various possible objections Smart makes it clear that he doesn't assert that an after-image is some kind of

[17] Ibid., p. 147.

object which could be identified with a brain-process. "*It is the* experience *which is reported in the introspective report.*"[18] Smart shows us that it doesn't make sense to think of after-images as some kind of objects, because when we speak about them, we do so in a specific sense. Namely, we refer *to an experience of having* an after-image: "*There is, in a sense, no such thing as an after-image or a sense-datum, though there is such a thing as the experience of having an image, and this experience is described indirectly in material object language, not in phenomenal language, for there is no such thing.*"[19]

Smart reveals a confusion which could lead to incorrect conclusions about the nature of the objects of our experiences. In spite of this insight he still doesn't consider an option that the specific status of our subjective experiences makes them something over and above brain processes. In a way he has a very good reason for this: experiences are not some *objects* which exist alongside the actual objective brain-processes. In this sense they are not something over and above brain processes. However, I believe that Smart simply misses something important, namely that sensations carry with them a *different aspect* of reality: its *subjective* aspect. In this sense we should not identify them with brain processes but we should acknowledge the fact that there is something going on (in a certain sense "over and above brain-processes") which has a subjective aspect. When we refer to conscious experiences we somehow point to this subjective aspect, whereas when we refer to brain processes we disregard it (even though our observation of brain processes is also an experience). It is precisely in this sense that sensations are something "over and above" – our reports of them point to an extra aspect of reality.

While replying to further objections, Smart encounters the fact of the above mentioned logic and meaning difference again and again, but it doesn't lead him to ascribe to sensations any special status over and above brain-processes. It seems that the main reason for this is that the only alternative to his reductive view that he takes into consideration is substance dualism: "*I suspect that the objector is thinking of the experience as a ghostly entity. So it is composed of something, not of nothing, after all. On his view it is composed of ghost stuff, and on mine it is composed of brain stuff.*"[20] This clearly shows that the subjective aspect of experience is doomed to be omitted from his account since all he is looking for are *objects*.[21]

[18] Ibid., p. 150.
[19] Ibid., p. 151.
[20] Ibid., p. 153.
[21] In his reply to Smart's paper, J. T. Stevenson understands the mentioned difference in meanings asserted by Smart as caused by different properties connected to sensations and brain processes. In the end he argues

Once again, I would like to point out an important distinction which seems to determine how Smart conceptualises conscious states: after-images and other conscious states can be rather confusingly understood as objects of sorts since they "stand in front of us" in a sense, have certain shape and colour etc. However, they are not real objects and when we refer to them we in fact refer to our *experience of having* an after-image, as Smart correctly notes. Another thing to remember is that even observation of the brain is always happening in someone's consciousness; the difference is that in this case we disregard this fact when we actually focus on and talk about the brain (and not an experience of observing the brain in someone's consciousness). This distinction is very important: we can think of something as a material object existing out there in the world, no matter whether we observe it or not. Note that even abstract (and only imagined) objects are often referred to as existing in their own "world". Then we can think of something as it appears in our consciousness, being a complex of colours, shapes, sounds or even feelings or pains etc. When we think of something in the second sense, i.e. when we relate it to our consciousness, we include the subjective aspect in our focus and this is the crucial difference. We normally disregard the subjective aspect in our thinking, no matter whether we apprehend the outer world or the world of abstract entities. When we think of sensations – our *immediate conscious* experiences, however, the subjective aspect sneaks in. Further in the thesis I will try to explain in what sense it sneaks in and why we cannot capture it adequately.

Smart is definitely right that there are no objects over and above brain processes. However, thanks to bringing the concept of *subject-object dichotomy* into the picture we are also able to realise that even though we are not referring to proper objects in our introspective reports we are nevertheless referring to something "over and above" brain processes. We refer to whatever we experience while *focusing on the experience itself*, the *act* of sensing something. We always think some objects but the act of experiencing is *not an object*; it is *subjective*. This act in its purity is what eludes Smart's account. To put it differently: Smart lacks the proper concept of subjectivity and thus he only sees the objective aspect of reality. Since conscious experiences are not "proper" objects (they are

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that Smart's identity theory thus implies that "brain processes turn out to have just those properties which have led some people to postulate that sensations are processes involving nonmaterial substance." Hence the theory has no advantage over some kind of substance dualism. See STEVENSON, J. T. A Reply to J. J. C. Smart. *The Philosophical Review.* Duke University Press, 1960, Vol. 69, No. 4, pp. 505-510, here pp. 507ff.

I believe that characterising the specificity of meaning of expressions referring to experience as grounded in some special *properties* which could even be ascribed to some *substance* is misleading because it leads to objectifying of consciousness. On the other hand, based on his talk of "ghost stuff" it really seems that Smart's theory leads to such a view.

not even made of "ghost stuff"), they have to be reduced (almost?) to nothing. The only "something" which is left is an actual, material, observable brain process. Experience in its subjectivity is thus unaccounted for.

3.2 Epistemological Scepticism

As the second example of an account which misses the idea of elusive subjectivity I have chosen McGinns's epistemological scepticism. This attempt to answer the question of the place of consciousness in the world is interesting because it does justice to our intuition that it just doesn't feel right to claim that conscious experiences are in fact brain processes. We find such solution unintelligible and unsatisfactory. However, in his attempt to identify the crucial reason why this is so, McGinn falls into the trap of objectifying thinking just as Smart did.

In his pivotal paper *Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?* Colin McGinn proposes an idea that we might be epistemologically closed towards the solution of the question concerning the relationship between brain structure and consciousness. It is naive to expect that our cognitive openness is unlimited:

"*We should therefore be alert to the possibility that a problem that strikes us as deeply intractable, as utterly baffling, may arise from an area of cognitive closure in our ways of representing the world. (...) We are biased away from arriving at correct explanatory theory of the psychophysical nexus. And this makes us prone to an illusion of objective mystery.* "[22]

This means that the fact that we perceive consciousness as something escaping physical description is caused by our inability to arrive at an actual and existing "*property of the brain that accounts naturalistically for consciousness...*"[23] Thus the explanation of consciousness in purely natural terms exists in principle. According to McGinn, consciousness is a biological phenomenon and its emergence must be explainable in terms of the description of matter organisation.[24]

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[22] MCGINN, Colin. Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem? *Mind: New Series*. Oxford University Press, 1989, Vol 98, No. 391, pp. 349-366, here p. 352.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., p. 353.

Later in the paper McGinn describes the way we access our consciousness: it is done via introspection. This type of access is characteristic by its directness and immediacy. Since the properties of consciousness are being presented to us in a very specific, immediate way, introspection cannot convey to us the actual nature of dependence of conscious states upon the brain.[25] Role of the brain is completely omitted in introspection and we might probably say that the logic of states presented via introspection differs from the logic of the data we acquire by actual observation of the outer world.[26] Property P which would account for the psychophysical nexus "*has to lie outside the field of the introspectable, and it is not implicitly contained in the concepts we bring to bear in our first-person descriptions. Thus the faculty of introspection, as a concept-forming faculty, is cognitively closed with respect to P...*"[27]

This points to the fact that when we introspect we focus on the subjectivity of our experiences. We abstract from any relation that our experiences could have to the brain, an object of our observation of the outer world. It is impossible to see our conscious states as objects having relation to other objects we encounter. That is the specificity of introspection – focusing on the directness and immediacy of consciousness as an irreducible aspect of our reality which cannot be grasped in objectifying thinking. It can only be pointed to. I don't think that McGinn really understands introspection this way. He rather thinks that it conveys specific objects (but still objects) – conscious experiences. I will return to this problem later.

Further in the text McGinn introduces another property of our consciousness which he believes is one of the reasons why we cannot solve the mind-body problem: with *our particular* form of consciousness we have no access to all possible forms of consciousness. We will never be able to grasp what it is like to be a bat or a Martian, and this somehow determines the seriousness of our cognitive closure:

"*...our concepts of consciousness just* are *inherently constrained by our own form of consciousness, so that any theory the understanding of which required us to transcend these constraints would* ipso facto *be inaccessible to us. (...) We constitutionally lack the*

[25] Ibid., p. 354.
[26] This is my allusion to Smart who also admitted certain tension between introspection and perception, as we could see in the previous section.
[27] Ibid., p. 355.

concept-forming capacity to encompass all possible types of conscious states, and this obstructs our path to a general solution to the mind-body problem."[28]

In contrast to McGinn I don't believe that having some specific type of consciousness has anything to do with our inability to solve the mind-body problem. Different forms of consciousness differ in type and range of their *objects*. However different the objects of various conscious states may be, they still share one crucial specific aspect: subjectivity. And it is this crucial and elusive aspect that makes it impossible for us to make sense of the possible nature of psychophysical nexus. To come to realise the essence of subjectivity is not to grasp every possible form of consciousness but to acknowledge the fact that the subjective in principle defies objectifying treatment. The above mentioned McGinn's thought about the requirement to have access to all possible types of consciousness reveals once again his tendency to see conscious states through their objects. He focuses on the conscious experiences insofar they are experiences of *something*, not insofar they are *subjective*.[29]

Apart from introspection there is yet another path we ought to consider in our quest for psychophysical nexus. It is perception. Thanks to perception we have access to a wide range of objects, including brain - an object of neuroscience. We might try to solve the mind-body problem using detailed knowledge about the brain and its properties. But according to McGinn it is precisely the fact that we use perception in investigating the brain that makes this approach doomed to fail. The problem lies in

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[28] Ibid., p. 356.

[29] The same objection applies to the conception of Thomas Nagel as introduced in *What is it like to be a bat?* On the one hand, he has some good points concerning reductionism and asserts that in the case of the theory of mental phenomena we cannot omit the subjective aspect: "It is impossible to exclude the phenomenological features of experience from a reduction in the same way that one excludes the phenomenal features of an ordinary substance from a physical or chemical reduction of it – namely, by explaining them as effects on the minds of human observers. (...) every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected to a single point of view, and it seems inevitable that an objective, physical theory will abandon that point of view." p. 437.

On the other hand, he seems to be too concerned with a *type* or a *form* of experience and our troubles with conceiving of experience of different species or other creatures radically different from us: "I am not adverting here to the alleged privacy of experience to its possessor. The point of view in question is not one accessible only to a single individual. Rather it is a *type*. It is often possible to take up a point of view other than one's own, so the comprehension of such facts is not limited to one's own case. There is a sense in which phenomenological facts are perfectly objective: one person can know or say of another what the quality of the other's experience is." pp. 441f. (Cf. also his proposal of a new method called "objective phenomenology", pp. 449f.)

In my opinion, by paying too much attention to inaccessibility of some *type* of experience Nagel loses sight of the real problem: the point is not that we cannot reach experiences of other creatures but rather that we cannot grasp subjectivity *as such*, not even our own subjectivity, since we are trapped in the *subject-object dichotomy*.

"*the role of* perception *in shaping our understanding of the brain – the way that our perception of the brain constrains the concepts we can apply to it. A point whose significance it would be hard to overstress here is this: the property of consciousness itself (or specific conscious states) is not an observable or perceptible property of the brain. You can stare into a living conscious brain, your own or someone else's, and see there a wide variety of unstantiated properties – its shape, colour, texture etc. – but you will not thereby* see *what the subject is experiencing, the conscious state itself. Conscious states are simply not potential objects of perception: they depend upon brain but they cannot be observed by directing the senses onto the brain.*"[30]

McGinn clearly reveals here that conscious states are definitely not objects of the same type as the brain. We will not find them by observing the outer world. Our perception of the outer world completely omits conscious states because they cannot be *looked at* from the *outside* (they are accessible only via introspection, as has been noted earlier). This implies that pure perception can never help us discover the so much sought for psychophysical nexus since it completely misses one of the members of the nexus.

McGinn expounds the reason why perception fails in the task. He believes it has something to do with senses representing the world spatially. Consciousness defies being represented in this way. Our senses "*essentially present things in space with spatially defined properties. But it is precisely* such *properties that seem inherently incapable of resolving the mind-body problem: we cannot link consciousness to the brain in virtue of spatial properties of the brain.*"[31] By relying purely on our senses we will necessarily miss properties whose character escapes our particular mode of perception and according to McGinn, *P* (property accounting for the mind-body relation) is exactly such property.[32] Postulation of some purely theoretical entity won't help us either since such an entity would be still analogical to what we observe. As long as we draw solely on explanations of the physical data we are cut off any possibility to account for their relation to consciousness. It is impossible to capture character of consciousness using physical descriptions, however sophisticated and detailed.[33]

[30] MCGINN, Colin. Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem? pp. 356f.
[31] Ibid., p. 357.
[32] Ibid., p. 358.
[33] Ibid., pp. 358f.

McGinn seems to be on the right track here: the concept we have of consciousness is radically different from any concept that we have or can possibly form of perceptually observable phenomena in the outer world. However, he still claims that the mentioned property P[34] of the brain has to exist: "*Nevertheless, the brain* has *this property, as it has the property of consciousness.*"[35]

It is obvious that the above described inability to arrive at the right account of the psychophysical nexus stems from the specific characters of introspection and perception. Introspection leaves out the brain, perception of the brain leaves out the conscious states. We might feel that there is some radical cleft present here. This could imply that we will never be able to understand how brain processes produce consciousness, even if we somehow grasped *P*. Neither of the faculties will allow us to "*witness the dependence*". McGinn disagrees with this view:

"*Is it not suspiciously empiricist to insist that a causal nexus can only be made sense of by us if we can conceive of its being an object of a single faculty of apprehension? Would we think this of a nexus that called for touch and sight to apprehend each term of the relation? (...) No, I think this suggestion is not enough to account for the miraculous appearance of the link: it is better to suppose that we are permanently blocked from forming a concept of what accounts for that link.*"[36]

I believe that by refusing the possibility that the cleft between introspection and perception plays a crucial role in our predicament concerning the unintelligibility of the psychophysical nexus McGinn misses something important. His claim that the relationship between sight and touch is somehow analogical to the relationship between introspection and perception is very problematic. Both sight and touch fall under perception. In the case of introspection and perception the situation appears to be radically different. There is a cleft between them and this is obvious from McGinn's own analysis of the both faculties

[34] C. H. Whiteley has a very good point when criticising the idea of the property *P*. Properties of the brain and properties of consciousness are radically different and precisely this radical "discrepancy" is the root of the problem. Property *P* is supposed to be a "mediator between brain and consciousness" but this requirement is very problematic: "If we cannot make sense of a causal relation between heterogeneous entities, then to allay our disquiet P has to be sufficiently homogeneous with the physical to be a plausible effect of physical causes, and sufficiently homogeneous with consciousness to be a plausible cause of conscious effects. I doubt whether these requirements could both be met." WHITELEY, C. H. McGinn on the Mind-Body Problem. *Mind: New Series*. Oxford University Press, 1990, Vol. 99, No. 394, p. 289.
[35] MCGINN, Colin. Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem? p. 359.
[36] Ibid., p. 360.

with respect to their closure towards the elusive nexus. He doesn't realise this because in his conception of introspection there is no emphasis on *subjectivity*. Once again, he understands introspection as presenting some objects – namely conscious states. In another text he suggests that introspection is a kind of a limited "sense" which doesn't provide us with enough information about its *objects*, because introspection "*is a single channel faculty, confined to a mere subset of the properties of its objects. We do not enjoy a rich variety of modes of apprehension of conscious states, analogous to the five senses we bring to the external world, and the single mode we do have is notably inflexible in its operation. Compare vision or touch, which provide multiple causal channels onto their objects...*"[37] What is more, he claims that we simply lack the senses which would enable us to see the connection between the brain and consciousness but some creatures could possess such senses in principle.[38]

However, conscious states are not comparable to objects of perception: when we focus on conscious states in introspection, we abstract from the fact that they represent "something". We focus on them as long as they are *subjective*. We can never *see* subjectivity, but we can realise the presence of this aspect and this is what happens in introspection.[39] When we introspect we pull back from the outer world and contract towards subjectivity. I tried to point out the same problem in the section on Smart: when we introspect we focus on *conscious* states inasmuch they are *conscious* and thus *subjective*. Conscious states are not proper objects because they are inseparable from subjectivity.

To put it in other words: when we perceive, we are aimed at the outer world and forget about the fact that we are still here as subjects. We see the outer objects and think of them from the 3rd person perspective. When we introspect, on the other hand, we realise ourselves as subjects and approach our subjective aspect. We see our conscious states from the 1st person view, so to say. However, this still doesn't capture subjectivity as such. We are always in *subject-object dichotomy*. We can only *realise* the fact of subjectivity, never *see it in front of us*. Subjectivity is too close to us to be seen. In fact, it would be more appropriately described as the 0th person view – the realisation of the fact of subjectivity is

[37] MCGINN, Colin. *Problems in philosophy: the limits of inquiry*. Repr. (1998). Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, 163 p. ISBN 1-55786-484-8, p. 38.
[38] Ibid., p. 40.
[39] I am aware of that my idea of how introspection should be understood actually changes the original meaning of introspection as observation of what happens inside my mind in contrast to what could be observed in the outer world. On the other hand, I believe that in order to explore the crucial aspect of consciousness we need a radically different approach towards our conscious states and that is what I try to suggest.

infinitely immediate and that's why the subjective can never become an object. It can never stand *in front of us* because it is always exactly where we are, it is in *zero distance* from us. I believe that the specificity of introspection dwells in this and not in representation of different kind of objects. Conscious states as such are not pure objects. They are saturated with the realisation of the presence of the subjective aspect of reality.

McGinn is quite close to doing justice to the real character of subjectivity when he claims that the solution to the mind-body problem might elude us in principle because of the way we think. He identifies certain cleft between introspection and perception. However, he doesn't go far enough to uncover the real source of the problem – the real elusiveness of subjectivity, the situation of *subject-object dichotomy*. It is obvious from what he suggests later in the paper. McGinn believes that in principle a mind (perhaps something like "*God's mind*") could exist that would grasp the needed solution to the mind-body problem (similarly as the creatures with the "right" senses mentioned before). This mind would form its concepts independently from introspection or perception and it would think in a priori terms. McGinn compares this to the way we think about numbers.[40] This means that the solution to the mind-body problem might very well exist in principle and the solution would be a scientific one:

"*What I want to suggest is that the nature of psychophysical connection has a full and non-mysterious explanation in a certain science, but that this science is inaccessible to us as a matter of principle. (...) In other words, there is no intrinsic conceptual or metaphysical difficulty about how consciousness depends on the brain. It is not that the correct science is compelled to postulate miracles* de re*; it is rather that the correct science lies in the dark part of the world for us. We confuse our own cognitive limitations with objective eeriness.*"[41]

The above mentioned ideas about super-senses, super-mind and super-science all show that McGinn expects the solution to be delivered in *objective* terms. Even though the concepts used in the solution would have to be created independently from introspection and perception they would still be based on objectivity or even on some kind of extra sensual perception. The solution would *stand in front of* the superior mind, which would simply *grasp* it. I don't think this is possible. The problem with insolubility of the mind-body

[40] MCGINN, Colin. Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem? p. 361.
[41] Ibid., pp. 361f.

problem dwells in the fact that subjectivity escapes *any* objectifying approach, however sophisticated it might be.

It is important to mention that claiming that the mind-body problem solution eludes our grasp doesn't imply that we have to presuppose some miracles in nature. McGinn refuses such presuppositions himself. The problem is that the only alternative to presupposing miracles that he can see is the above mentioned solution in objective terms: "*The* philosophical *problem about consciousness and the brain arises from a sense that we are compelled to accept that nature contains miracles – as if the merely metallic lamp of the brain could really spirit into existence the Djin of consciousness. But we do not need to accept this: we can rest secure in the knowledge that some (unknowable) property of the brain makes everything fall into place.*"[42] The third alternative, I believe, would amount to acknowledging the situation of *subject-object dichotomy*. There is nothing miraculous about this. By emphasizing the elusive character of subjectivity we are by no means evoking some "ghostly" entity, for such entity will have to be understood as an object as well. What I am trying to accentuate is that we simply need to realise that the subjective pole is unobjectifiable. It is a pure fact, irreducible aspect of our reality.

It seems very confusing to me that McGinn actually comes across some version of the idea of the unobjectifiable subjective pole when he refers to the problem of the "self" but he doesn't mention it when talking about consciousness. He talks about "*the systematic transcendence of the self in acts of self-awareness*". Whenever I turn to myself and try to make myself an object of my focus,

"*then the subject of this focus inevitably transcends its object. (...) The self always, and systematically, steps out of cognitive reach. Even if the reflecting self and the self reflected upon are numerically identical, I can never stand back and apprehend this identity, since I shall always occur as a subject in my reflections as well as an object.* Qua *subject I can never be an intentional object to myself. This systematic elusiveness of the self makes it frustratingly difficult to pin down; we can get no cognitive fix on it.*"

Then it becomes clear that McGinn doesn't think of consciousness as such along these lines: "*Perhaps, indeed, the so-called self–as-object is really just some subset of the attributes of the self-as-subject – say, one's present state of consciousness.*"[43] State of

[42] Ibid., p. 362.
[43] MCGINN, Colin. *Problems in philosophy: the limits of inquiry*, p. 48.

consciousness is again seen as a kind of object. However, in my opinion it is consciousness which makes the self so elusive; consciousness is that aspect of us which escapes objectifying thinking. It is inseparable from subjectivity – this is what I have been trying to show all along. The gap between the brain and conscious states is grounded in the subjectivity of consciousness. Introspection differs from perception precisely in that it comes closer to subjectivity.

In conclusion, McGinn might indeed be right that we are cognitively closed towards resolving the mind-body problem. However, he doesn't seem to correctly identify the reasons for this. It is not just that the solution could exist in principle but the minds of *our sort* have no access to it. It is rather that any solution which could be called "scientific", that is to say, which would operate with object-based concepts, has to be ruled out. It is impossible to capture subjectivity in the same way as we capture objects of the outer world or even abstract objects of our minds. Subjectivity is at the base of every act of our having any object (and perceiving immediate feelings and sensations) in the first place. It is immediate and ultimately direct. It can only be realised as a pure fact "that" it is present. It is that aspect of reality which is absolutely essential for the conscious awareness, for the fact that anything is actually going on in our minds.

3.3 Naturalistic Dualism

Now I would like to introduce a view which is on the best way to see subjectivity as an irreducible and unobjectifiable aspect of reality. In contrast to the previous views, David Chalmers' "naturalistic dualism" does justice to the elusive character of consciousness, even though he doesn't seem to go far enough in his analysis to uncover where exactly the elusiveness dwells.

David Chalmers is well aware of the abyss which exists between the subjective and the objective. It is utterly impossible to reduce conscious states to something objective. There are indeed some objectively observable phenomena connected to consciousness which can be explained in principle by the methods of physical science. They pose so-called "easy" problems.[44] Apart from these relatively unproblematic phenomena, however, there is also an aspect of consciousness which defies the usual scientific treatment. This is

[44] CHALMERS, D. J. *The character of consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 596 p. ISBN 978-0-19-531110-5, p. 4.

the *hard problem*: "*The really hard problem of consciousness is the problem of experience. When we think and perceive, there is a whir of information processing, but there is also a subjective aspect. As Nagel (1974) has put it, there is* something it is like *to be a conscious organism. This subjective aspect is experience.*"[45] Chalmers can see that subjectivity is something radically different from the usual objects of science. There's something going on in the minds of conscious beings - something over and above physical brain processes. *This* is the fact that needs explaining.

Chalmers realises that any attempt to reduce consciousness to something emerging from the brain matter is deeply unsatisfactory. We have a strong intuition that something is being left out of the picture: "*It is widely agreed, that experience arises from a physical basis, but we have no good explanation of why and how it so arises. Why should physical processes give rise to a rich inner life at all? It seems objectively unreasonable that it should, and yet it does.*"[46] We again encounter the intuition which played an important role in McGinn's account as well. We feel that we simply cannot understand the possible nature of the psychophysical link. While McGinn tried to explain this intuition as the result of our cognitive closure, Chalmers takes it more seriously – that is to say, he believes that the intuition really mirrors the actual nature of reality and that the idea of revealing the sought-for nexus might be mistaken.

Chalmers maintains that no purely physical theory will ever be able to yield a definitive answer. Methods of physical sciences describe observable processes and their functions but they are silent when it comes to accounting for the actual presence of conscious experience. All that the physical theory reveals about the various observable phenomena in terms of their functions could just as well be described as taking place in absence of subjective experience:

"*What makes the hard problem hard and almost unique is that it goes* beyond *problems about the performance of functions. To see this, note that even when we have explained the performance of all the cognitive and behavioural functions in the vicinity of experience – perceptual discrimination, categorization, internal access verbal report – a further unanswered question may remain:* why is the performance of these functions accompanied by experience? *A simple explanation of the functions leaves this question open.*"[47]

[45] Ibid., p. 5.
[46] Ibid., p. 5.
[47] Ibid., p. 8.

Whenever we explore functional features of cognitive phenomena, we disregard experience. Functions manifest themselves in the outer world and can be conceptually grasped without any allusion to subjectivity. Every account of consciousness which is based on explanation of functions or which works with some kind of purely physical description fails to address the most ardent question: "*It follows that no mere account of the physical process will tell us why experience arises. The emergence of experience goes beyond what can be derived from physical theory.*"[48]

Chalmers further notes that purely physical explanations are presented in terms of structure and dynamics and that this is their crucial shortcoming: "*However, the structure and dynamics of physical processes yield only more structure and dynamics, so structures and functions are all we can expect these processes to explain.* (...) *When it comes to a problem over and above the explanation of structures and functions, these methods are impotent.*"[49] Consciousness is obviously the phenomenon which escapes these methods: "*The problem of consciousness is puzzling in an entirely different way.*"[50]

Chalmers comes up with his own solution, which he calls *nonreductive*: "*Others have argued that conscious experience lies outside the domain of scientific theory altogether. I think this pessimism is premature.* (...) *When simple methods of explanation are ruled out, we need to investigate the alternatives. Given that reductive explanation fails,* nonreductive *explanation is the natural choice.*"[51]

The core of Chalmers' theory is based on the observation that not all phenomena in physics are explainable in terms of simpler entities. Sometimes physicists encounter an entity which has to be treated as *fundamental*: "*Fundamental entities are not explained in terms of anything simpler. Instead, one takes them as basic and gives a theory of how they relate to everything else in the world.*"[52] Electromagnetism, mass and space-time are supposed to be examples of entities of the mentioned kind. Based on this idea, Chalmers puts forward a suggestion that we accept consciousness as fundamental: "*We know that a theory of consciousness requires the addition of* something *fundamental to our ontology, as everything in physical theory is compatible with the absence of consciousness.*"[53]

[48] Ibid., p. 14.
[49] Ibid., p. 15.
[50] Ibid., p. 16.
[51] Ibid., p. 16.
[52] Ibid., p. 16.
[53] Ibid., p. 17.

This nonreductive theory will add new principles to the basic laws of nature. These *psychophysical* principles, as an extra ingredient to physical theory, are supposed to shed light on the way consciousness depends on the physical features of the world: "*A physical theory gives a theory of physical processes, and a psychophysical theory tells us how those processes give rise to experience. We know that experience depends on physical processes, but we also know that this dependence cannot be derived from physical laws alone. The new basic principles postulated by a nonreductive theory give us the extra ingredient that we need to build an explanatory bridge.*"[54]

Chalmers' naturalistic dualism rest on an idea that *"...the universe ultimately comes down to a network of basic entities obeying simple laws and that there eventually may be a theory of consciousness cast in terms of such laws.*"[55]

From the new perspective of *subject-object dichotomy* we can see that Chalmers fully acknowledges the elusiveness of the subjective pole. Any method working with objects will necessarily miss the fact that the subject is present as well. However, it seems to me that Chalmers does not analyze the situation deeply enough to be able to point to the exact reason why physical accounts completely omit the subjective aspect. He doesn't explicitly work with an idea that this aspect is in principle *unobjectifiable.*

Chalmers is no doubt persuaded that conscious experience can never be captured by any purely physical description, however thorough and sophisticated. We always feel that something is being left out of the picture. The reality of our subjective conscious states is undeniable. For Chalmers this has to imply that consciousness is a fundamental part of nature, just as mass or space-time. I tend to think, however, that he still leaves unanswered the question as to why consciousness has to be fundamental. He stresses that physically described cognitive processes can take place without the presence of experience, thus experience remains unaccounted for by such descriptions. But why does it seem to us that we can imagine those physical processes take place without experience? I think that the ideas about introspection and perception which we encountered earlier might help us to analyze the situation more deeply.

When we perceive or when we simply focus on the objects of our consciousness, we disregard the subjective aspect of these acts. We kind of "forget" about subjectivity. Our scientific descriptions and theories are formed while we are in this mode of perception

[54] Ibid., p. 17.
[55] Ibid., p. 18.

and objectification. Both the objects of the outer world and our concepts *stand in front of us* and we *grasp* them, so to say. The subjective pole is utterly invisible for us under these conditions, because we are directed outside, towards the objects. Subjectivity is at the core of our having any objects at all, but most of the time we are not aware of this. In introspection, on the other hand, we pull ourselves back from the world of objects standing in front of us. We explore what we "see" in a different way: our conscious states are not pure objects. We still see them, because they "have objects" and certain "properties" (e.g. colour) but we don't focus on those objects as such anymore. We shift our attention to the fact that something is going on inside our minds. This way we approach our subjectivity, the subjective pole. As Jaspers correctly emphasizes, subject can never become an object. In introspection we can only come closer to the realisation that subjectivity is here, that there is something endlessly direct and immediate which is the basis for any possible experience. In introspection, our conscious states are not pure objects because they are "touched" by subjectivity.

When we realise this, it is possible to give a clearer answer to the above mentioned question why consciousness seems to be irreducible and therefore fundamental. Our concept of consciousness (in the sense of subjective experience) is (or at least should be) very specific: it is not purely object-like as other concepts we have. Concept of consciousness is "touched" by subjectivity. When we think of our conscious experience we come closer to being aware of the fundamental fact "that" there is something going on. We can never say "what" is going on, because that would mean talking about some object. Direct, immediate and undeniable fact of us as subjective poles creeps into the concept of consciousness and it is its elusive character, its unobjectifiability, which renders it so problematic. The situation of *subject-object dichotomy* is the crucial reason why we are unable to capture the subjective character of consciousness in our scientific, objectifying accounts. I believe that this is what can put more light on Chalmers' intuitions about the fundamentality of consciousness.

3.4 Ontological Subjectivity

I believe that when it comes to identifying the root of our problem with finding intuitively satisfactory explanation of consciousness, John Searle can provide us with the right

insights. His formulation of the problem comes very close to the concept of *subject-object dichotomy*. The way he expresses his views is, in my opinion, very apt and convincing.

It has already been mentioned several times that a subject can never become an object of observation. Subject is the necessary basis from which all the possible objects can be reached. Searle expresses this thought as follows: "*We cannot get at the reality of consciousness in the way that, using consciousness, we can get at the reality of other phenomena.*"[56] We tend not to realise that whenever we observe, we are still here as conscious beings. The observations always take place in our consciousness. The fact is so natural that most of the time we don't think about it at all.

One of the most important of Searle's thoughts is concerning the nature of introspection. I already mentioned that its core characteristic is often overlooked. The point is not that introspection provides us with *different objects* (namely inner mental states) when compared to perception; what is important to accentuate is the fact that introspection is not fully about *objects*. Its specificity dwells in the attention being focused on the very *fact that* conscious observation is taking place. Searle brings in some further insights:

"*The very fact of subjectivity, which we were trying to observe, makes such an observation impossible. Why? Because where conscious subjectivity is concerned, there is no distinction between the observation and the thing observed, between the perception and the object perceived. The model of vision works on the presupposition that there is a distinction between the thing seen and the seeing of it. But for "introspection" there is simply no way to make this separation. Any introspection I have of my own conscious state is itself that conscious state.*"[57]

There is nothing being observed, because the subjective conscious state is not an object. I don't observe the conscious state, because I am *in it*. I am in the "zero distance" from it.

It is a mistake to try to think of subjectivity as having some "place" in the world. Only objects can be pictured this way and subjectivity is very much *not an object*. Looking for some complete *objective* view of the whole of reality is the wrong way to understand the world. In his analysis of the problem Searle reflects both on the character of

[56] SEARLE, J. R. *The rediscovery of the mind*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992, 270 p. ISBN 0-262-19321-3, pp. 96f.
[57] Ibid., p. 97.

subjectivity and the way we tend to picture reality around us. He reaches the conclusion that

"*There is, in short, no way for us to picture subjectivity as part of our world view because, so to speak, the subjectivity in question is the picturing. The solution is not to try to develop a special mode of picturing, a kind of superintrospection, but rather to stop picturing altogether at this point and just acknowledge the facts. The facts are that biological processes produce conscious mental phenomena, and these are irreducibly subjective.*"[58]

Searle doesn't claim that consciousness escapes physical laws. On the contrary, consciousness is completely natural. All the problems connected to the mind-body problem and the futile effort to come up with a theory which would explain consciousness as part of the objective reality originate from the wrong conceptualisation of consciousness. Subjectivity of consciousness is something we can only realise and acknowledge; we can never observe it and describe it in objectifying terms. Subjectivity is a simple fact *that* conscious states are taking place.

Searle points out that we have a very specific idea of reality observation. According to this idea there are observers (objective in the epistemic sense) who observe the outer reality (ontologically objective). Subjectivity of the act of observation is not a phenomenon belonging to the side of the observed reality. It doesn't make sense to try to observe the act of observing itself:

"*For the act of observing is the subjective (ontological sense) access to objective reality. Though I can easily observe another person, I cannot observe his or her* subjectivity. *And worse yet, I cannot* observe *my own subjectivity, for any observation that I might care to make is itself that which was supposed to be observed. The whole idea of there being an observation of reality is precisely the idea of (ontologically) subjective representations of reality. The ontology of observation – as opposed to its epistemology – is precisely the ontology of subjectivity. Observation is always someone's observation; it is in general conscious; it is always from a point of view; it has a subjective feel to it; etc.*"[59]

[58] Ibid., p. 98.
[59] Ibid., pp. 98f.

Thanks to these analyses the dichotomy between subject and its objects becomes obvious. It is a specific cleft which doesn't exist between two distinct objective domains; it is rather a cleft without the second objective domain, a cleft as such.[60] This might lead us on the way to build a new and more appropriate model for understanding the consciousness problem.

The manner in which we speak about the phenomenon of subjectivity may indeed lead us to picture it inappropriately. We speak of subject and object – two poles which somehow stand against each other. In order to start to appreciate the real problem of finding "place" for consciousness in the world we need to come up with a new model. Searle emphasises the role of observation models in our confusion: "*The point is rather that because of the ontology of subjectivity, our models of "studying," models that rely on the distinction between observation and thing observed, do not work for subjectivity itself.*"[61] I believe that the new model, the one that would be much better suited to convey the phenomenon of subjectivity, will have to be based on the idea of elusive subjectivity. The fact that subjectivity cannot be captured as an object is never stressed enough.

Hence Searle identifies crucial misconceptions to which we are susceptible when dealing with consciousness. Perhaps the most insidious feature of these misconceptions is the "Cartesian vocabulary" – we tend to oppose "physical" to "mental", "body" to "mind", etc. and we don't realise that such oppositions might be completely unwarranted.[62] On Searle's view, dualism is mistaken but this doesn't mean that materialism is right; the problem is that also materialism accepts Cartesian categories: "*Dualists asked, "How many kinds of things and properties are there?" and counted up to two. Monists, confronting the same question, only got as far as one. But the real mistake was to start counting at all.*"[63] By accepting Cartesian categories we in fact *objectify* consciousness. We treat it as another kind of "stuff" and thus confound the whole matter.

Materialism, unreflectively accepting the Cartesian categories, involves an assumption that entirely physical reality is inconsistent with the existence of subjective reality and this is the root of all our problems with consciousness. Searle suggests that we simply "*embrace consciousness as just another material property among others*". There are some philosophers who claim that they did just that (Armstrong, Dennett) but Searle

[60] The idea of a cleft without the second objective domain is loosely inspired by Jan Patočka's idea of "chórismos". Cf. PATOČKA, Jan. *Negativní platonismus*. 3. opr. vyd. Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2007, 71 p. ISBN 978-80-7298-273-8, p. 54.
[61] SEARLE, J. R. *The rediscovery of the mind*, p. 99.
[62] Ibid., p. 15.
[63] Ibid., p. 27.

points out that "*they do this by so redefining "consciousness" as to deny the central feature of consciousness, namely, its subjective quality.*" Materialist philosophers seem to be really afraid of "*the essentially terrifying feature of subjectivity.*"[64] To emphasize the main point again, the need to get subjectivity out of the picture and claim that there is no such thing arises from an idea that subjectivity is some additional objective stuff which composes our universe. Since it cannot be found somewhere out there in the brain or anywhere else in the physical world we tend to infer that it simply doesn't exist. But the very assumption that we actually should be able to find it *somewhere*, provided that it exists at all, is utterly wrong. We should become open to a possibility that the nature of reality transcends the categories we naturally tend to apply to it.

Searle provides further insights into the sources of the above mentioned misconceptions about the relationship between consciousness and the physical reality: "*there is a persistent objectifying tendency in contemporary philosophy, science, and intellectual life generally.*" We simply assume that for something to be real it has to "*be equally accessible to all competent observers.*" Reality is defined as *objective*. No wonder that the theories based on this assumption shift "*away from the subjectivity of mental states toward the objectivity of the external behaviour.*" We suddenly lose the most important aspect of consciousness – the feature of subjectivity. This all happens due to "*the third-person character of the epistemology*". Searle's point is that the fact that our epistemology works in this specific way should not avert us from "*the actual ontology of mental states*" – "*a first-person ontology*".[65]

Subjectivity is an undeniable and *natural* aspect of reality and the fact that we have troubles viewing it this way has to do with the misconceptions based on the way we tend to understand reality. It is immensely important to realise that reality is multifaceted and, as Searle asserts, it cannot be correctly described as purely objective since "some of it is subjective". We should not confuse the epistemological and ontological sense of subjectivity and objectivity. On the one hand, it is important to avoid subjective prejudices or emotions when we explore some physical phenomenon from the third-person view. On the other hand, it is impossible to omit first-person view when we refer to subjectivity and consciousness, since subjectivity in this case is not being referred to epistemologically but *ontologically* - as a *category* of empirical reality.[66]

[64] Ibid., pp. 55f.
[65] Ibid., p. 17.
[66] Ibid., p. 20.

After carefully distinguishing ontological sense of subjectivity from epistemological sense we can see more clearly that it is absurd to "*try to treat consciousness itself independently of consciousness, that is, to treat it solely from a third-person point of view...*" since this approach leads to denial of the existence of the subjective reality.[67] We cannot reduce consciousness to underlying physical processes in the same way we reduce heat to "*kinetic energy of molecule movement*". In the case of heat we actually want to abstract from subjective experience of heat because we are, for practical reasons, interested in the underlying causes of the phenomenon. In the case of conscious experiences, however, the subjective aspect is what we are interested in:

"*We find out about heat or light by feeling and seeing, but we then define the phenomenon in a way that is independent of the epistemology. Consciousness is an exception to this pattern for a trivial reason (...) that the reductions that leave out the epistemic bases, the appearances, cannot work for the epistemic bases themselves. In such cases, the appearance is the reality.*"[68]

Hence consciousness is irreducible but not in any mysterious way; rather, "*its irreducibility is a trivial consequence of our definitional practices.*"[69] As I understand Searle, we simply decided to define certain phenomena in a certain reductive way because it helps us better categorise and understand them. The fact that we cannot adequately define conscious states on this model doesn't imply that consciousness is supernatural. It only points to the fact that consciousness falls into a different category than the other defined phenomena such as light or heat (or lightning – referring to Smart).

Hence it seems obvious that humans understand the world in their own specific way. Their scope of understanding is no doubt larger in comparison to other animals (e.g. dogs) but Searle warns us against forgetting our evolutionary origins. The conjecture that our brains are capable of comprehending all that exists is highly dubious – there is no evolutionary reason for this.[70] We should not be surprised if we discover that we have considerable problems conceptualising certain aspects of reality. I believe that this is precisely the case when it comes to dealing with consciousness. There is probably no evolutionary reason why we should be able to grasp subjectivity; we are supposed to be

[67] Ibid., p. 21.
[68] Ibid., pp. 120f.
[69] Ibid., p. 123.
[70] Ibid., pp. 24f.

able to deal with the outer environment and with the world of objects since thus we can ensure our biological survival.

Anyway, we are getting to the view that all the confusion around consciousness is a result of our cognitive limitations: our understanding evolved to fulfil specific functions and its scope isn't infinite. Searle mentions comment made by Noam Chomsky that we view the world in such a way that "*anything is either physical or unintelligible*"[71]. Our understanding is based on operation with objects and only objectively accessible phenomena seem to be conceivable as parts of physical reality. Searle hits a very important point here: in order to understand the problem of subjectivity we need to look at the nature of our cognitive apparatus.

I consider Searle's insights concerning our conceptualisation of subjectivity very helpful and very close to the ideas I would like to defend in this thesis. I've been trying to show that the satisfactoriness of each of the previously mentioned theories of consciousness depends on the extent to which they manage to identify the problem of elusive subjectivity. It seems to me that any attempt to explain consciousness as some "part" of the objective world is mistaken. The real problem has to do with our conceptualisation of subjectivity. In the following chapters I will try to develop this idea further.

[71] Ibid., pp. 26f.

4 The Nature of Our Cognitive Capacity

The aim of this chapter is to explore possible answers to the question why we have such problems with the right conceptualisation of subjectivity. This should help me illustrate my position in the consciousness debate. Firstly I will mention some examples of our tendency to conceptualise more elusive aspects of reality by creating metaphors and models based on objective and naturally perceptible aspects of reality. I will refer to the thoughts of Lakoff and Johnson (metaphors) and Sellars (models). Then I will introduce a view which could explain this tendency and according to which we posses highly specific and thus limited cognitive capacity. It is based on Noam Chomsky's ideas concerning the nature of language capacity and human epistemic boundedness. I will return to the thoughts of Colin McGinn and this time I will focus on his quest for the possible explanation of our cognitive closure with regard to the mind-body problem which is based on Chomsky's idea that human cognitive capacity has its roots in language. Inspired by these views I will provide a speculation as to how our epistemic boundedness might determine our conceptualisation of the world and how this relates to the problem of consciousness.

The view I am about to introduce is speculative and should serve as an illustration but I believe that the main idea bears considerable credence: we think about reality and understand it in a very specific way which might render us blind with regard to certain essential aspects of it.

4.1 Metaphors and Models

As far as I am concerned, the assertion that we use various metaphors and models to better conceive of phenomena which surround us is generally accepted. Lakoff and Johnson explore our metaphoric grasp of reality which is present in the way we speak and think about various phenomena we encounter in our lives. The metaphors often consist in picturing certain abstract or directly unobservable aspects of the world we live in as solid and directly perceptible objects. For example: "*Events and actions are conceptualized metaphorically as objects, activities as substances, states as containers.*" We refer e.g. to a race as though someone is *in* the race or *going to* the race – it is conceptualized as a

container or as an object.[72] By conceptualizing complex states of affairs (such as races) this way we are able to better orientate in our complex reality. Metaphors should enable us to picture "*one thing in terms of another*" and thus help us to understand.[73]

It can be quite difficult for us to handle some important concepts that "*are either abstract or not clearly delineated in our experience (the emotions, ideas, time, etc.)*" and that's why "*we need to get a grasp on them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms (spatial orientations, objects, etc.). This need leads to metaphorical definition in our conceptual system.*"[74] The point is simply that our understanding is closely connected to concepts that are "*structured clearly enough and with enough of the right kind of internal structure to do the job of defining other concepts. That is, they provide the right kind of structure to allow us to get a handle on those natural kinds of experience that are less concrete or less clearly delineated in their own terms.*" To provide some examples, in order to better handle and metaphorically define experience captured by concepts such as "*LOVE, TIME, IDEAS, UNDERSTANDING, ARGUMENTS, LABOUR, HAPPINESS, HEALTH, CONTROL, STATUS, MORALITY, etc.*", we might use concepts capturing other kinds of experience or objects, such as "*PHYSICAL ORIENTATIONS, OBJECTS, SUBSTANCES, SEEING, JOURNEYS, WAR, MADNESS, FOOD, BUILDINGS, etc.*". To give more detailed example, we understand time "*almost entirely in metaphorical terms (via spatialization of TIME and the TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT and TIME IS MONEY metaphors).*" Our concepts and "*dimensions in terms of which we structure our experience (e.g., parts, stages, purposes)*" are deeply rooted in our everyday experience of interacting "*with our physical and cultural environment*"; they "*emerge naturally from our activity in the world*".[75] This shows that our cognitive capacity functions in a specific way and that it is very dependent on understanding in terms of perception of outer objects and interaction and manipulation with the outer world. We need less concrete kinds of experience to be presented via more concrete "images" which are based on easily *graspable* kinds of experience of our world.

Consciousness is a perfect example of an elusive concept which is definitely not concrete enough to be handled by our understanding. It is not surprising at all that it is so often objectified in many various theories. However, this doesn't mean that it is less real

[72] LAKOFF, George and Mark JOHNSON. *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, 242 p. ISBN 02-264-6801-1, p. 40.
[73] Ibid., p. 44.
[74] Ibid., p. 114.
[75] Ibid., pp. 116f.

than phenomena which are objectively perceptible. Also Lakoff and Johnson emphasize this point by saying that physical experience doesn't have to be "*more basic*" since "*emotional, mental, cultural, or whatever*" experience is no doubt constantly present in our everyday lives. They are simply trying to show that "*we typically conceptualize the nonphysical* in terms of *the physical – that is, we conceptualize the less clearly delineated in terms of the more clearly delineated.*" E.g. we can say that someone is "*in love*", even though love is not a container, etc.[76] Along similar lines we can say that we are looking for a *place* for consciousness *in* the world or we can even *look for* conscious states *in* the brain. However, we rarely realise that we should be particularly careful about such metaphors; it obviously happens very often that we take them too literally. We treat subjectivity as some object which should be present somewhere in the world and forget that this is only a metaphor. We hold on to it because without it we would be unable to *grasp* the subjective aspect of reality – and *grasping* plays a crucial role in our understanding, as I will try to show in the following sections.

Also Wilfrid Sellars provides some useful ideas and even though he doesn't introduce them in the context of the debate I focus on here I find his insights inspiring and I decided to use them to illustrate my point. One of his ideas is concerning the nature of our conceptual thinking. Its important feature is that it provides "*a way of representing the world*".[77] As we have already seen, it is very important to represent reality in such a way that we understand it so that we can orientate in it more easily. Such understanding can be reached via conceiving of complex or "nonphysical" phenomena in terms of physical experience, as Lakoff and Johnson asserted. And indeed, also Sellars notes that we conceive of thoughts and sensations "*by analogy with publicly observable items*". As for the sensations, we conceive of "*a 'blue and triangular sensation' by analogy with the blue and triangular (facing) surface of a physical object which, when looked at in daylight, is its cause.*"[78] Such analogies may help us feel that we better understand the phenomenon in question but by focusing on the analogy with an *object* we lose "sight of" the essential subjectivity of sensations.

In a different paper Sellars asserts that "states *of the perceiving subject*" can be conceived as *particulars*. The reason for this has its root in the fact that the theory of impressions in question "*is formulated in terms of a* model." According to this model "*an*

[76] Ibid., p. 67.
[77] SELLARS, Wilfrid. *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man* [online]. First published in 1962 [cit. 2014-07-06]. Available from: http://selfpace.uconn.edu/class/percep/SellarsPhilSciImage.pdf, p. 17.
[78] Ibid., p. 35.

impression of a red triangle is a red and triangular replica*, not* seeing of a red and triangular replica." Thus impressions are incorrectly seen as particulars: they are seen as some "replicas" inside the perceivers which "*share the perceptible characteristics of their physical source*" - actual objects (red triangles). However, impressions are not particulars but *acts* of perceiving the red triangles. The confusion arises because we misunderstand the role of models in the theory. We incorrectly assume "*that if the entities of the model are particulars, the theoretical entities which are introduced by means of the model must themselves be particulars*".[79]

As I understand Sellars, we create models in order to be able to refer to certain complex states of affairs we encounter, e.g. that there is something like perception going on. We imagine that *something* actually happens in perceiving subjects – something rather concrete, *particular* and well delineated such as impressions. The real nature of what is actually going on is much more elusive. Anyway, my point is that the shortcoming of most of the theories of consciousness is that they conceive of conscious states as objects (either in a sense that they are identical with brain processes or that they are objects of introspection). By employing objectifying models we necessarily abandon subjectivity of the conscious phenomena.

The above mentioned accounts of our conceptual thinking should serve as an illustration of the tendencies which are characteristic of our way of thinking and understanding. It seems obvious that there are phenomena, complex states of affairs and aspects of reality which defy our proper grasp of them. On the other hand, we are perfectly equipped to handle experience of perceptible physical objects located in space. Our understanding as such seems to be based on this natural ability - that's why we have strong tendencies to conceptualize elusive concepts in terms of those clear to us. This reflects in our use of metaphoric conceptual tools and cognitively accessible models in our encounters with multifaceted reality which in turn implies that our view of the world has to be distorted since we are deeply rooted in our conceptual milieu. This opens us to a possibility that our cognitive capacity has limits and that it is not able to accurately represent all aspects of reality. In the next section I will introduce views which go exactly in this direction.

[79] SELLARS, Wilfrid. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* [online]. Edited in Hypertext by Andrew Chrucky,1995, first published in 1956 [cit. 2014-07-06]. Available from: http://selfpace.uconn.edu/class/percep/SellarsEmpPhilMind.pdf, p. 191.

4.2 The Relationship between Language and Epistemic Boundedness[80]

In the first two parts of this section I will introduce Chomsky's conceptions of language, cognitive capacity, epistemic boundedness and the problem of "radical emergence" of consciousness. This should make it clear on which Chomsky's thoughts McGinn bases his own ideas and to what extent he does so. The third part is dedicated to the discussion of McGinn's position and in the fourth part I will try to state my own standpoint by confronting the views of both philosophers and suggesting some additional speculation.

4.2.1 Chomsky: Language as a Basis for Human Cognitive Capacity

In the first part of this section I will present Chomsky's notion of the character of language and its relationship to human intellectual and cognitive capacity. This should help me to accent those aspects of his theory of language which inspired McGinn in developing his own conception.

Chomsky puts forward a suggestion that language is a crucial part of what is sometimes called the "human capacity" which encompasses "*the human capacities for creative imagination, language and other modes of symbolism, mathematics, interpretation and recording of natural phenomena, intricate social practices and the like, ... a complex that sets humans apart rather sharply from other animals, including other hominids, judging by the archaeological record.*"[81] Chomsky agrees with the common assumption that the faculty of language plays a key role in the structural formation of the human intellectual capacity. He mentions claims of paleoanthropologist Ian Tattersall which suggest that the "*invention of language*" was the essential abrupt event which led to the emergence of the human capacity in the course of evolution.[82] Structures within human brain were radically modified as a result of some "*genetic event*" and newly formed faculty of language became the cornerstone of other specifically human faculties. Thoughts could become expressed in various different ways which enabled further social development and other "*sharp changes of behaviour that are revealed in the archaeological record.*"[83] As I understand it, the ability to formulate one's thoughts in such a way that they can become

[80] This section is mostly based on an essay I wrote in 2012 in a course on Noam Chomsky.
[81] CHOMSKY, Noam. *Language and mind*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 190 p. ISBN 05-218-5819-4, pp. 175f.
[82] Ibid., p. 176.
[83] Ibid., p. 176.

expressed and form a sort of fixed and internally structured system of symbols provided humans with further possibilities of interaction with the outer environment. This led to the further growth of specific skills which play role in dealing with stimuli and forming multiple categories and concepts.

Chomsky further stresses the possibility that the primary function of language has indeed to do with enabling symbolic thought and that its aspects connected to communication might have developed only secondarily. He quotes Nobel Laureate François Jacob: *"'"The quality of language that makes it unique does not seem to be much its role in communicating directives for action"... but rather "its role in symbolizing, in evoking cognitive images," in "molding" our notion of reality and yielding our capacity for thought and planning, through its unique property of allowing "infinite combinations of symbols" and therefore "mental creation of possible worlds."'"*[84] These ideas thus seem to imply that capacities which make us understand the world around us in a certain way and which enable us to "step back" and employ new ways of grasping and explaining reality have their roots in our linguistic faculty. We wield power of combining a huge amount of symbols within a complex system characterised by various rules which enables us to form abstract concepts, explanatory theories, etc. This leads humans to much more effective orientation in their environment and ability to make correct predictions which are based on rather detailed knowledge of relationships between different aspects of nature.

In the previous paragraph I already briefly touched upon an elementary but very interesting and essential fact about language mentioned by Chomsky: the language faculty "*is a system of discrete infinity, rare in the organic world. Any such system is based on a primitive operation that takes objects already constructed, and constructs from them a new object: in the simplest case, the set containing them. Call the operation Merge.*"[85] Thanks to the language faculty humans can operate with constructed symbols and by "merging" them together create new complex mental entities which no doubt prove to be highly useful with regard to the need to function effectively in the environment. "*With Merge available, we instantly have an unbounded system of hierarchically structured expressions.*"[86] Creativity understood in such terms yields new ways of categorizing, conceptualizing and subsequently dealing with whatever challenges the outer world brings. The conjecture that linguistic faculty is an essential source of all the other faculties connected with our

[84] Ibid., p. 177.
[85] Ibid., p. 183.
[86] Ibid., pp. 183f.

intellectual supremacy can be supported also by speculations about the origins of the mathematical capacity. Chomsky suggests that this capacity might be based on "*an abstraction from linguistic operations…*"[87] If we really owe our best capabilities as humans to the simple language-based "merge operation", then it also implies that our way of grasping the world is rather specific and restricted. I will discuss this possibility further in the text.

4.2.2 Epistemic Boundedness and the Problem of Emergence

In the second part of the section I would like to briefly introduce Chomsky's conception of epistemic boundedness[88] and then mention what he has to say about the philosophical problem of "emergence" of consciousness. By this I hope to draw attention to some interesting points which are crucial for speculations I will discuss in the subsequent sections of the chapter.

Since we are biological beings we have certain internal capacities which enable us to function in our environment. Chomsky brings forward an idea that these capacities "*reflexively provide us with what ethologists called an* Umwelt*, a world of experience, different for us and for bees – in fact, differing among humans, depending on what they understand.*"[89] Our picture of the world is therefore very specific and in no way the only one possible. We depend on whatever means of grasping the outer reality the nature bestowed upon us.

We are not some perfect divine beings which are bothered by no boundaries while they grasp the innermost essence of reality. On the contrary: we are biological organisms determined by structural and functional characteristics of our bodies (including brains) and hence "*our basically shared capacities of understanding and explanation have limits…*" and "*much of what we seek to understand might lie beyond our cognitive limits – maybe a true understanding of anything, as Galileo concluded, and Newton in a certain sense demonstrated.*"[90] We should be definitely more humble and cautious with regard to speculations about the reach of our cognitive abilities. It is naive to think that our species

[87] Ibid., pp. 184f.
[88] The term "epistemic boundedness" was coined by Jerry A. Fodor in *The Modularity of Mind*. See FODOR, J. A. *The modularity of mind: an essay on faculty psychology*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983, 145 p. ISBN 02-625-6025-9.
[89] CHOMSKY, Noam. The Mysteries of Nature: How Deeply Hidden? *The Journal of Philosophy*. The Journal of Philosophy, Inc., 2009, Vol. 106, No. 4, pp. 167-200, here p. 183.
[90] Ibid., p. 184.

reached the ultimate intellectual plateau and that there are no door closed for us in the intricate and eternally mysterious world of all possible questions and answers.

Now I can finally get to the problem of consciousness: Chomsky suggests that an example of a problem which challenges our always struggling intellectual capacity appears with our attempts to properly formulate the relationship between brain processes and consciousness. Some philosophers claim that if we maintain that consciousness is an emergent property of the brain then this emergence should be understood as "radical". We can conceive of liquidity being emergent from aggregation of molecules, "*where the properties of the liquid can in some reasonable sense be regarded as inhering in the molecules.*" According to thinkers such as Nagel or Strawson, this view cannot be held when it comes to neurons and consciousness. The emergent property must be "*in some sense wholly dependent*" on the entities from which it emerges and "*all features*" of the new property must "*trace intelligibly back to*" the base for emergence.[91] In the case of relationship between brain processes/neurons ("*non-experiental reality*") and consciousness ("*experiental reality*"), these conditions are apparently not met.

However, Chomsky does not share Strawson's intuitions about the "radical emergence" which are put forward in his "*No-Radical emergence Thesis*". Chomsky seems to be convinced that we do not need to fully "conceive of" how a certain property emerges from its basis (like in "*molecule-liquid example*"). It is enough that science can describe the properties of the constituent entity (e.g. Hydrogen and Oxygen) which make it possible for this constituent entity to enable the formation of the emergent entity (in this case water): "*What seemed "brute emergence" was assimilated into science as ordinary emergence – not, to be sure, of the liquidity variety, relying on conceivability. I see no strong reason why matters should necessarily be different in the case of experiental and non-experiental reality, particularly given our ignorance of the latter...*"[92] Our ability to conceive of something depends on how we intuitively understand things, not on our scientific description of them. Science, as Chomsky understands it, doesn't need to convey ultimate explanations in mechanistic[93] or some other "intuitive" or "common-sense" terms. We should be satisfied with formulations of principles which help us predict certain phenomena and at best hope to find some new concepts enabling us to see the posed

[91] Ibid., p. 192.
[92] Ibid., pp. 192f.
[93] Mechanical common-sense understanding includes ideas that objects are persistent through time and space (which comes together with their cohesion and continuity), that causality happens through contact, that body is only able to affect body and motion is only able to produce motion. Ibid., pp. 167f.

problems in a new way. Thus "*adopting the Newtonian style of inquiry while dismissing considerations of common-sense plausibility*" is the right way to go.[94]

The above mentioned ideas seem to lead Chomsky to a conclusion that reflecting on epistemic boundedness reveals to us the true nature of "the emergence problem". As cognitively limited beings we can only have science which formulates certain laws and principles etc. without satisfying our intuitive need for common-sense understanding. Such understanding can only be misleading because it makes us think that we might have an ability to grasp the essential and ultimate truth about reality. We see the world in a specific and limited way and therefore cannot assume that we actually know the true nature of the physical. Any claim stating that the emergence of consciousness from the brain is "radical" is thus irrelevant and misleading.

In my opinion, the above mentioned conclusions have something in common with the mentioned Jaspers' view that the whole of reality is always "torn apart" in our thinking. We are able to present only one aspect of the world in our thinking and necessarily forget about the rest. This could be seen as a special kind of cognitive closure. Our thinking is very specific and focused on specific portion of reality. When we try to encompass the whole using this limited faculty we encounter obvious problems. Also McGinn developed his own view of our cognitive closure. Some of his thoughts are very useful but some are problematic, as I will try to show in the following sections.

4.2.3 McGinn: Our Cognitive Closure with Respect to the Mind-Body Problem

In the third part of the section I would like to explore possible connection between the two previously discussed Chomsky's conceptions concerning the nature of language and epistemic boundedness. This connection was suggested by Colin McGinn in his article *The Problem of Philosophy*. I will try to present McGinn's central idea so that I can work with it later, in the final section of the chapter.

McGinn mentions Chomsky's suggestion that our ability to operate with numbers, our "*arithmetic faculty*", might be based on our linguistic faculty "*since the number series also exhibits discrete infinity, albeit over a distinct domain.*" If we develop this thought further we might come to a conclusion that "*the cognitive structure thus made available by*

[94] Ibid., p. 193.

this extension from language" is "*a central element in our general ability to formulate intelligible theories of the world. That structure enables us to conceive of arbitrary domains in terms of combinatorial rules that generate a potential infinity of derived entities from a fixed set of individual elements.*" This has to have a huge impact on our mode of thinking. As McGinn puts it, "*the crucial notion of compositionality enters our thinking, cropping up in many unrelated areas, and allowing us to generate theories in which it essentially features.*"[95]

McGinn further suggests that intellectual faculty thus formed "cooperates" with the faculties of our senses which bring with them "*spatial representation*" of the world:

"*Then we might expect a mode of cognition that deals in discrete elements embedded within a continuous medium and capable of rule-governed processes of agglomeration. This would be suitable as a basis for representing the world of material objects in space, these being systems of combined elements, variously located, and capable of assuming indefinitely many different forms. So we can understand, at least in broad outline, how our grasp of physics might arise from grammar plus spatial representation – as arithmetic arises, according to Chomsky's speculation, from the iterative character of language.*"[96]

We can immediately see that such understanding of the world as characterised above renders us cognitively limited. We form our concepts and theories in a very specific way and this necessarily means that we are cut off the possibility to develop science which would capture all aspects of reality. "*In other words, cognitive accessibility is a function of similarity to the concerns of our linguistic and perceptual faculties; crucially, it turns upon the applicability of the combinatorial paradigm supplied by language.*"[97] We are able to understand only those phenomena which can be satisfactorily described by theories formed according to principles of combination and representational principles based on our sensory experience. According to McGinn, it is possible that some philosophical problems whose solutions still elude us must fall into the other category: "*Do our difficulties here rise from the circumstance that the phenomena of interest to us cannot be made to conform to the paradigm of a collection of elements that combine lawfully into complex wholes*

[95] MCGINN, Colin. *The Problem of Philosophy* [online]. 1994 [cit. 2014-07-06]. Available from: http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/courses/consciousness97/papers/ProblemOfPhilosophy.html, part IV, §2.
[96] Ibid., part IV, §3.
[97] Ibid., part IV, §4.

which depend for their properties upon those of their constituent parts?"[98] Here we arrive at the problem of "radical emergence" already mentioned in the previous section.

As has already been shown, the relation of consciousness to the brain poses an ultimate challenge to our intellects. McGinn, developing Chomsky's ideas further, tries to come up with a suggestion as to why this is so. We simply cannot conceive of consciousness as being in some way "just" a complex of interrelated neurons. "*Sensations do not stand to neurons as sentences stand to words or as macroscopic bodies stand to molecules. Hence the usual (and reasonable) talk of radically emergent properties, of explanatory gaps, of peculiar kinds of novelty in the world.*"[99] The way in which we usually understand other natural phenomena ("*model set by language (and perception)*") somehow fails to do justice to the intricacy of the "consciousness-brain" problem. When looking at the brain we can only see a highly complex web of interrelated neurons. We simply cannot see how this structure, however advanced, could possibly give rise to subjective conscious states. We miss some property of the brain which could make it possible.[100] The reason why it is so difficult for us to think of the brain and consciousness as being suitable to constitute one unit might have to do with the fact that, when we join subject to predicate, we join "*elements that we find maximally transparent… The hooking together of pieces of matter is not so far off…*" But when we are trying to join the physical and the mental, thus formed "*concatenation*" is "*exhibiting no inner coherence: we cannot make it fit, even by analogical extension, the paradigm of a well-formed unitary sentence.*"[101] We might try to make it fit (our tendency to do so is indeed very strong), but this attitude only leads to inappropriate and distorted conceptions of reality.[102] Thus the proper grasping of the relation between brain and consciousness seems to be cognitively inaccessible to us.

I agree with McGinn up to this point. However, as I mentioned in the section 3.2 which was also dedicated to his account of the mind-body problem, he asserts that an *objective* scientific solution of the problem exists in principle. Our cognitive closure is based on a fact that our minds are not sophisticated enough to come up with the right science and that we lack the right senses which would *see* the sought for connection between the brain and conscious states. I believe that our cognitive closure is much deeper

[98] Ibid., part IV, §5.
[99] Ibid., part IV, §6.
[100] Ibid., part IV, §6. This is the property *P* mentioned before in the section 3.2.
[101] Ibid., part IV, §7.
[102] Ibid., part IV, §8.

than that: the objective scientific solution might be inaccessible *in principle*. If we take McGinn's thoughts inspired by Chomsky and develop them further we may get an idea as to why this should be the case.

4.3 Conclusions about the Nature of Our Cognitive Closure

Thoughts of Lakoff, Johnson and Sellars helped to illustrate our natural tendencies to see elusive aspects of reality through metaphors and models. Chomsky suggested that human intellectual capacity is based on language and thus works in a very specific way. Although this specificity is very useful for certain tasks it implies limits: we are good at conceptualising certain aspects of reality but we might not be able to grasp everything, or grasp it without distorting it. What is more, it is obvious that science after Newton is not based on intuitive conceivability anymore. We discover laws and correlations but we often *don't understand* the underlying mechanisms (quantum physics is a good example). We might be in the same situation with regard to the problem of consciousness: we know that it supervenes on brain activity and we discover still new correlations but we are unable to conceive of the psychophysical link, as McGinn points out in his analysis. Consciousness seems to defy being combined with our other concepts into a coherent explanatory model of reality. The reason for this may be revealed via employing the idea of elusive nature of subjectivity. To see why subjectivity defies normal conceptualisation we need to characterize how we normally think and understand.

Firstly, I would like to stress the thought that we better understand concepts formulated in terms of physical experience, outer objects and particulars, as well as McGinn's suggestion concerning the cooperation between the language faculty and the faculty of representation brought to us by our senses. I believe that these are actually very useful observations. We first need something which is *presented* to us in order to further operate with it intellectually. Whenever we form symbols or whenever we combine them and form new models, all these units have to have "figurative" or "demonstrative" character to them, by which I mean that they have to be conceived in some "spatial-like /sense-like" manner, they have to "stand" in front of us in form of some "object". Of course, we also have various abstract concepts, but these too are always "presented" in our thinking in some metaphoric way (they also are objects), otherwise we would not be able to further employ them in our intellectual operations. It seems to me that these features of

"being demonstrable /presentable" or "object-like" are crucial to our intuitive feeling that we understand something, that we "grasp" it, so to say. Mechanistic view of the world is a good example. People thought that the "real" explanation must be provided in terms of solid objects interacting together. Even nowadays people feel this way, being led by their "common sense" or "intuition".

Our ability to create complex structures of interrelated symbols and concepts certainly provides us with a certain kind of understanding: we understand that phenomena we encounter are related and we are able to demonstrate these relationships in a certain way which is no doubt very convenient. However, our way of describing natural laws and interconnection of phenomena might be based on a specific pattern of brain functioning which is characterised by combinatorial and representational operations. Our perspective is highly specific and must therefore capture reality only partially and imperfectly. Depth of our understanding is determined by the level of complexity exhibited by our "reality models". If we want to do justice to the phenomena we explore we might be unable to create models satisfying our intuitive idea of conceivability; we can at best formulate theories that help us make predictions and formulate laws. Similarly, all the models which turn conscious phenomena into pure objects (and are thus "graspable") end up missing something essential. If we want to avoid such distortion of the phenomenon the only thing we are left with is the observation that conscious states supervene on and emerge from brain processes while we don't understand how this happens.

McGinn's conception enriches Chomsky's conclusions about our cognitive limits by further speculation as to *why* a certain emergence could seem "radical" to us – in other words: why we don't understand how the emergence comes about. However, I propose a suggestion that there might be yet another answer to the "radical emergence" perplexity which neither McGinn nor Chomsky seems to consider and which is closely related to the way our language-based cognitive apparatus works. As I already mentioned, McGinn's conception implies that every entity which enters our intellectual operations has to have "figurative" or "demonstrative" character. Let's say that every such unit is (at least) intuitively transparent to us. We can more-or-less easily fit it into our hierarchical system of symbols. What is more, it is only natural to assume that units which figure in language-based operations should be of such nature which enables them to become *expressed*. When encountering state of affairs where "radical emergence" seems to be the case, we should ask ourselves *why* the two aspects of reality in question do not "fit together". Answer may

lie in the fact that each of these two aspects exhibits a different way of being demonstrated or presented to us. This concerns the brain-consciousness relationship.

Brain can be represented spatially and we can understand its functioning by forming concepts and models dealing with interrelations of its parts. The crucial aspect of consciousness, on the other hand, cannot be presented this way. Even though we can reflect on our conscious states and recognize certain structure etc., we do not capture what actually "makes consciousness conscious" this way. There is a *subjective pole* which escapes any our attempt to capture it in *objective* and clearly expressible terms. This subjective pole does not demonstrate itself because anything that can be demonstrated is being demonstrated *to it*.[103] Here we come back to the idea of *subject-object dichotomy*. We do not *see* consciousness because consciousness lies at the core of our *seeing* (or imagining) everything else. As I have been suggesting throughout the thesis, this might be the reason why we feel perplexed by the suggestion that brain processes give rise to conscious states. We still feel that the very *subjective* aspect of conscious states somehow escapes such reductionist conception and the reason why this is so lies in the character of our cognitive capacity based on language and perception: we can only operate with clearly demonstrated and possibly expressible units and only such units can play a role in development of our understanding of the natural phenomena. We could not possibly form an adequate concept of the subjective pole which would fit our concepts of sensually perceptible entities or concepts of such aspects of the world which could at least be conceived of via some object-like symbols.

Someone could object that we in fact have a certain concept of consciousness and "the subjective" which is "presented" somehow in our thinking. This objection could be answered by saying that the presence of such concept is only a demonstration of our tendency to see everything via metaphors and models based on demonstrable symbols. It does not mean that such concept captures consciousness correctly; rather, as has been already mentioned, it distorts it. We have some kind of *direct connection* to our subjectivity and this very connection is probably the source of our feeling that consciousness is radically different from what we call "the physical". But "such a feeling" cannot be handled by the capacity which enables us to operate with what our senses offer us. Every concept which captures phenomena presented to us via perception leaves the fact

[103] I have to note once again that McGinn isn't a stranger to this idea; he just doesn't seem to see it connected to the problem of consciousness as much as to the problem of self. This only shows how confused we get when it comes to conceptualisation of consciousness.

of our subjective aspect behind, or to put it in other words: the subjective pole is always "behind its back". Only the concept of consciousness tries to "hold" the subjective aspect "in view" (even though it can in principle never do it adequately). Such concept is *not fully faithful to the "presentable /demonstrable /object-like" character which our intellectual understanding requires of its objects*. No wonder that a concept which tries to "smuggle in" something "subjective" defies our attempts to join it with concepts based on physical experience. At this point we cease to understand.

This means that we are not able to come up with a satisfying account of consciousness because we still tend to look for understanding based on operation with *objects*, be they metaphors and models based on perceptions of the outer environment or abstract entities such as numbers or other symbols. We are used to explaining and understanding phenomena around us in a specific way based on our cognitive endowments. This is perfectly in accord with the idea of *subject-object dichotomy*: we are always turned to objects, whenever we perceive, think or dream - whenever we are conscious. This is perfectly natural for us –simply a way how we understand the world. However, this specific mode of cognition comes with a certain "blind spot": we are unable to *see* consciousness in its essence, because we are unable to *turn towards* subjectivity. The only way we would have a chance to understand the relation between brain and conscious states would be to turn subjectivity into an object of sorts; this has been done so many times, as I tried to show in the third chapter and further illustrated in the section on metaphors and models. The objectifying approach betrays us, however, since it completely deforms the real nature of subjectivity.

The only way we can get out of this confusion is to acknowledge that our natural mode of thinking and understanding is not fit to accommodate an appropriate concept of subjectivity. We can, of course, point to all kinds of correlations between brain processes and consciousness and reveal very interesting and useful facts. However, we will never be able to *understand* the connection and I believe, unlike McGinn, that there is no creature in principle who would be capable of this type of understanding, while by understanding we mean objective grasping based on objective concepts, models or symbols.

Cognitive closure that prevents us from forming an objective account of how consciousness fits into physical world amounts to the situation of *subject-object dichotomy*: our understanding and explanations happen within the scope of our thinking which is based on operation with objects – symbols and concepts combined together into theoretical models. Consciousness, thanks to its subjective nature, cannot be properly

conceptualised in such a way as to fit this schema. We need to overcome our strong tendency to objectify and come up with a new way of referring to consciousness and subjectivity in order to do justice to its elusive character. In the following chapter I will try to suggest how we should approach subjectivity and its relation to reality.

5 Transcending Objectifying Thinking

In the first chapter after introduction I briefly mentioned Jaspers' idea of being as falling apart into contrasting and yet interdependent poles and the idea of the ultimate unity of being, "*das Umgreifende*" (the Comprehensive). Now I would like to return to them in order to bring them together with the conclusions I arrived at in the previous chapter. If we want to find a way how consciousness fits into the world we might get some useful and insightful inspiration from Jaspers.[104]

As Jaspers asserts in *Philosophie*, apart from objects that I think there is *me*, the subject who knows about its own being and there is also being of things independently of my grasping of them. This idea may sound rather speculative but for me the main point is that neither of the poles of being can be proclaimed to be *being as such*, the ultimate being. Each of them constitutes one way of being which cannot exist without the others. We cannot find the whole of being because it cannot be understood as some genus encompassing the three poles or as an origin from which they would develop. None of them has precedence over the others and even though they are inconvertible to each other they vehemently need each other.[105] The merit of this thought is that it opens us up to the possibility that it might be really naive and misleading to think that we can capture the ultimate reality of being using our usual mode of objectifying thinking. Being must be much more complex and multifaceted and our inability to account for subjectivity seems to support this view.

Rainer Thurnher notes that Jaspers doesn't define being precisely but from the context of his philosophy it is evident that by being he means the ultimate unity which transcends everything partial, the basis of meaning and reality, the root of all phenomena. It is also a source of the ultimate experience of fulfilment. Philosophy stems from the realisation that we are torn away from this ultimate unity. It gains its momentum from the feeling that all that we usually encounter is insufficient, that it doesn't provide us with the

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[104] I am well aware that my exposition of Jaspers is very limited and might even be distorting. His conception of being and the Comprehensive is highly elaborated but I will not attempt to introduce it here in its complexity. I should make it clear that my aim in this thesis is to demonstrate the boundaries of our objectifying thinking and only point to what might lie beyond them, while my inspiration by Jaspers remains loose. Elaboration of this alternative approach towards reality would be a whole new enterprise.

[105] "Keines ist das Sein schlechthin, und keines ohne das andere; jedes ist ein Sein im Sein. *Das Ganze dieses Seins aber finden wir nicht.* Es ist weder das Gemeinsame, von dem als der Gattung die drei Weisen des Objektseins, Fürsichselbstseins, Ansichseins Arten wären, noch der Ursprung, aus dem sie sich entfalten. Sie stoßen als heterogene sich ebenso entschieden voneinander ab, wie sie einander bedürfen (...) *Kein Sei kann einen Vorrang beanspruchen,* es sei denn unter einem bestimmten Blickpunkt." JASPERS, Karl. *Philosophie: I. Philosophische Weltorientierung*, p. 6.

fulfilment we really need from the depths of our being.[106] For my purposes I can use this idea as an inspiration for a concept of reality in its unity – ultimate being which transcends partial aspects of the world that we encounter in our lives as conscious beings.

We are always captured in *subject-object dichotomy*. All we are able to think of are objects while at the same time we feel that objects are not all there is. This means that everything that is, if we wanted to encompass it all at once, has to be neither object nor subject. Jaspers notes that "*being as such cannot be an object. Everything that becomes an object for me breaks away from the Comprehensive in confronting me, while I break away from it as subject.*" We cannot grasp the Comprehensive in the same way we grasp other objects; it is not *presented* to us; rather, it is *manifested* in the fact of *subject-object dichotomy*.[107]

It shouldn't be surprising that we have troubles getting used to the idea of the Comprehensive since it defies our usual mode of thinking. It "*does not bring knowledge of a new object which we then apprehend, but aspires with the help of the idea to transform our consciousness of being.*" This has certain implications for our treatment of the idea: it could appear to be "empty". All we have is the realisation that it opens us to a new meaning of the world and everything that is.[108] This also strangely transforms the meaning of our cognitive closure: the problem is not that we are simply not perfect enough to grasp being as such (its objective and subjective aspects as one); rather, ultimate being is not there to be *grasped* at all. Grasping can only happen within the framework of *subject-object dichotomy*, in the situation which is as such *a priori* blind to the ultimate being because it is always torn out of it. Access to being as such has to be radically different.

The peculiarity of handling the Comprehensive is nicely illustrated by Jaspers' reflection on our thinking about the ever present situation of *subject-object dichotomy*:

"*The moment we state the subject-object dichotomy in which we always find ourselves and which we cannot see from outside, we make it into an object. But this is basically incongruous. For dichotomy is a relation between things in the world which confront me*

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[106] THURNHER, Rainer, Wolfgang RÖD and Heinrich SCHMIDINGER. *Filosofie 19. a 20. století*, pp. 229f.
[107] JASPERS, Karl. *Way to wisdom: an introduction to philosophy*, p. 30.
"Das Sein schlechthin kann nun offenbar nidit ein Gegenstand (Objekt) sein. Alles, was mir Gegenstand wird, tritt aus dem Umgreifenden an mich heran, und ich als Subjekt aus ihm heraus." JASPERS, Karl. *Einführung in die Philosophie: 12 Radiovorträge*, p. 25.
[108] Ibid., p. 31.
"... weil sie nicht die Erkenntnis eines neuen Gegenstandes bedeutet, der dann faßlich wird, sondern mit Hilfe des Gedankens eine Verwandlung unseres Seinsbewußtseins bewirken möchte." p. 26.

as objects. This relation becomes an image by which to express what is not visible and can itself never become an object."[109]

We are so bounded by objectifying thinking that we have to use such images and all we can do to do justice to the phenomenon described by them is to repeatedly remind ourselves of their inadequacy. We can only *point to* the fact of *subject-object dichotomy* and the Comprehensive but we can never *think it*.

This leads to an idea that empirical knowledge is not the only way in which we are connected to reality. Indeed, there are moments of realisation in our lives that there is more to being than just what stands in front of us, objectively. Of course, Jaspers is not the only thinker who tries to handle this "phenomenon"; the thought resonates also within works of other thinkers.[110] Our "zero" distance from our own subjectivity is an ultimate example of a special kind of "knowledge". I believe that this is the reason why the consciousness debate never ceases to perplex us. The fact of subjectivity points to a whole new dimension of being.[111] As I understand Jaspers, he perceives the realisation of our "imprisonment" in *subject-object dichotomy* as an opportunity to *transcend* it.[112] Mysticism points to this human ability:

"*...man can transcend the subject-object dichotomy and achieve a total union of subject and object, in which all objectness vanishes and I is extinguished. Then authentic being opens up, leaving behind it as we awaken from our trance a consciousness of profound and*

[109] Ibid., p. 32.
"Die Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung, in der wir immer darin sind, die wir nicht von außen zu sehen vermögen, machen wir, indem wir sie aussprechen, zum Gegenstand, aber unangemessen. Denn Spaltung ist ein Verhältnis von Dingen in der Welt, die mir als Objekte gegenüberstehen. Dieses Verhältnis wird ein Bild, um auszudrücken, was gar nicht sichtbar, niemals selber gegenständlich ist." p. 27.
[110] My favourite example is Patočka's discussion of the experience of freedom in *Negativní platonismus*.
[111] Jan Patočka describes the "subject, spirit, consciousness" as a protest against objective being. The world I see in front of me is not all there is because *I* am here as well, the understanding and perceiving I which remains unobjectified: "... v okamžiku, kdy tato zvláštní předmětnost – subjekt, duch, vědomí – povstává uprostřed ostatního skutečna, nemůže jinak než protestovat proti němu, ba není obsahově, jakožto předmět, něčím více než protestem proti předmětnému jsoucnu. Tento protest je bohaté stavby: je protestem proti výlučnosti předmětného jsoucna a tento protest se odehrává ve formě ‚svět, který chápu, který je zde, není vším' – neboť jsem tu ještě já, chápající a vnímající, ve chvíli tohoto protestu ovšem ještě nezpředmětněný. Ale protest vědomí jde ještě dále a hloub: nepostihuje toliko skutečnosti, reality předmětné jako konstatované a konstatovatelné, někde ve světě přítomné, nýbrž předmětnost samu. Nebýt základní stavby ducha, k níž náleží, co bychom rádi nazvali afekcí negativní, afekcí předmětu záporností, nebylo by vědomí vůbec možné, aspoň nikoli vědomí v jasné polární formě subjekt-objekt. Tato negativní afekce se projevuje tím, že sice klademe veškerenstvo věcí (a svůj rozdíl od nich), ale zároveň nemůžeme věřit a nevěříme, že bychom v něm měli plné, pravé jsoucno..." PATOČKA, Jan. *Věčnost a dějinnost: Rádlův poměr k pojetím člověka v minulosti a současnosti*. 3. rozš. vyd. Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2007, 135 p. ISBN 978-807-2982-561, p. 103.
[112] JASPERS, Karl. *Way to wisdom: an introduction to philosophy*, p. 37.

inexhaustible meaning. For him who has experienced it, this becoming one is the true awakening, and the awakening to consciousness in the subject-object dichotomy is more in the nature of sleep."[113]

I am aware that statements like that may sound very speculative and eluding empirical treatment. But in fact *that is the point*. Experiences of this sort don't (or at least shouldn't) come with an assertion that there is some other, new, higher level of reality. The *experience itself* is the very reality in question. This again calls to mind Patočka's idea of *chórismos* from *Negativní platonismus*[114]: whenever we manage to transcend the given, presented, objective reality, there is a tendency to view this transcendence as reaching of some other objective "higher world" or of "the real being", all this within some ultimate "science".[115] However, this is the mistake lying at the root of the problem. Similarly as Patočka's experience of freedom, the mystical experience described by Jaspers has no *objective* content. There is an abyss between objective being and the Comprehensive – not an abyss which divides two objective realms but an abyss as such, without a second objective pole.[116] The Comprehensive cannot be empirically proven since empirical proofs belong to the state of our minds in which we are torn out of the ultimate unity, being held tightly in the grip of the *subject-object dichotomy*.

What is more, transcendence towards the Comprehensive is incommunicable. We can only properly express "*that which takes an object form*". But the pure fact of the experience lurking behind those speculative philosophical ideas gives them their meaning.[117]

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[113] Ibid., pp. 33f.
"Der Mensch vermag die Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung zu überschreiten zu einem völligen Einswerden von Subjekt und Objekt, unter Verschwinden aller Gegenständlichkeit und unter Erlöschen des Ich. Da öffnet sich das eigentliche Sein und hinterläßt beim Erwachen ein Bewußtsein tiefster, unausschöpfbarer Bedeutung. Für den aber, der es erfuhr, ist jenes Einswerden das eigentliche Erwachen und das Erwachen zum Bewußtsein in der Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung vielmehr Schlaf." p. 28.

[114] I will not attempt to provide an interpretation of Patočka's ideas; I use them purely as a loose inspiration for finding a proper way of speaking of the problem in question.

[115] "Metafyzika předpokládá celým svým založením transcensus přes veškeré světové jsoucno; ale tento transcensus ji má pozvednout k novému, „pravému" jsoucnu a dopomoci jí tak k „pravé vědě"." PATOČKA, Jan. *Negativní platonismus*, p. 34.

[116] Cf. Patočka's expressions: "... chórismos je však původně oddělenost *bez* druhého předmětného oboru. Běží o mezeru, která neodděluje dvě říše, které jsou koordinovány nebo spojeny v něčem třetím, co obě objímá a co je základem jak jejich koordinace, tak vzájemného oddělení. Chórismos je oddělení, rozlišení o sobě, oddělení absolutní, samo pro sebe." PATOČKA, Jan. *Negativní platonismus*, p. 54.

[117] JASPERS, Karl. *Way to wisdom: an introduction to philosophy*, p. 34.
"Reden können wir aber nur von dem, was gegenständliche Gestalt gewinnt. Das andere ist unmitteilbar." JASPERS, Karl. *Einführung in die Philosophie: 12 Radiovorträge*, p. 28.

The most important idea which resonates throughout the whole discussion of the transcendence towards the Comprehensive is that believing that all there is to being is objectively perceptible, presented to us and standing in front us, is unwarranted. We cannot prove this claim precisely because it cannot be objectively presented. However, our troubles with handling consciousness - the elusiveness of subjectivity – point to the ever present *subject-object dichotomy* which reveals to us the secret of the ultimate being: only by transcending objectifying thinking can we possibly access being as such – being encompassing both subjective and objective aspects of reality. It is only up to us whether we will consider this thought empty or whether we will dare to free ourselves of the world of objects our usual mode of thinking traps us in. To do justice to the phenomenon of consciousness is to acknowledge that objectifying thinking is only one limited way in which we relate to what there is. Our epistemic closure towards the solution to the problem of consciousness doesn't dwell in the fact that we have no access to an existing and principally accessible objective solution; rather, it dwells in our clinging to objective solutions as such. I believe that Jaspers points to something important which makes human life incommunicably deep.

"*The fall from absolutes which were after all illusory becomes an ability to soar; what seemed an abyss becomes space for freedom; apparent Nothingness is transformed into that from which authentic being speaks to us.*"[118]

[118] Ibid., p. 38.
"Der Sturz aus den Festigkeiten, die doch trügerisch waren, wird Schwebenkönnen - was Abgrund schien, wird Raum der Freiheit - das scheinbare Nichts verwandelt sich in das, woraus das eigentliche Sein zu uns spricht." p. 31.

6 Conclusion

Exploring various modern theories of consciousness from the perspective of the concept of elusive subjectivity and Jaspers' *subject-object dichotomy* enabled us to locate where our problems with accounting for subjective aspect of reality have their roots. We have to realise that what makes consciousness so intractable when subjected to objectifying approaches is the fact that its fundamental feature is subjectivity. Subjectivity can never be captured in objective terms, it is *unobjectifiable*.

We could see that Smart's theory of identity is completely blind with regard to the specific character of subjectivity since he understands reality as consisting purely of objects. He has no conceptual tools which would enable him to point to the subjective aspect of reality and that's why from his point of view there is no mind-body problem after all. By omitting some overt acknowledgement of subjectivity his theory remains intuitively unsatisfactory.

McGinn comes with an interesting view of the mind-body problem: he propounds that we are cognitively closed towards the right solution of this predicament. However, he falls into the trap of objectifying thinking by his assertion that an objective scientific solution exists in principle and that some superior minds could possibly have access to it.

Chalmers is on the right track by acknowledging the fundamental irreducibility of the subjective aspect of consciousness to physical explanations. However, his conception still lacks proper elucidation of the fact that consciousness has to be viewed as fundamental and irreducible aspect of reality.

Searle is the thinker who captures the core of the problem very succinctly. By his emphasis on the drawbacks of Cartesian concepts and his conception of ontological subjectivity he comes very close to the idea of *subject-object dichotomy*. What is more, he draws attention to the fact that as finite biological beings we must have certain cognitive limits.

From this viewpoint we could smoothly move to exploring the main causes of our propensity to conceptualize consciousness and subjectivity in a wrong and distortive way. Referring to Lakoff, Johnson and Sellars helped us to demonstrate the nature of our tendency to understand reality we encounter in terms of metaphors and models based on clearly delineated and demonstrable objectifying concepts. Chomsky's theory of our cognitive apparatus rooted in language capacity and epistemic boundedness and McGinn's

development of these ideas provided further inspiration: it is possible that our tendency to try to understand consciousness as a part of objective, physically describable reality, stems from the fact that our intellectual capacity is based on certain combinatorial principles applied to sets of object-like demonstrable symbols. By applying the idea of *subject-object dichotomy* to this theory it is possible to speculate that concept of consciousness which is at least partially faithful to its crucial feature of elusive subjectivity simply doesn't fit our other object-based concepts. Thus any reductive view will always seem unsatisfactory and leaving out the crucial aspect of conscious experience.

Thus we come to a conclusion that in order to come to understand how consciousness relates to the rest of reality we have to reconsider our approach towards reality and being as such. Here the inspiration by Jaspers (and also Patočka) returns once again. Thanks to realising the ever present situation of *subject-object dichotomy* we reveal the possibility that our usual objectifying thinking is not the only way we can relate to reality, to being, to what there is. We also know that *we* are here as subjects but we will never be able to *grasp* this fact in objectifying terms. We can only acknowledge it. This is a clue leading us to the view that reality in its unity, being as a whole or whatever we may call it, is neither object nor subject (and not even "being in itself" of things independently of a subject). If we want to see consciousness and the physical world in their unity, the essential subjective feature of consciousness will prevent us from reaching this understanding within the boundaries of our usual thinking aimed at objects. The only possible way to reach the ultimate unity might be through an act of transcendence. However, this ability to transcend our objectifying tendencies comes from our deepest and incommunicable intuitions which are not susceptible to proof since they don't claim the existence of some *new*, higher realm. They are the reality themselves for those who revealed them *inside*.

I will have to leave it open whether the act of transcendence is possible or not. What is undeniable, though, is that through our infinite closeness to subjectivity we discover *unobjectifiable* realm within us and no matter how hard we try to tame it and force it into objective moulds we will never succeed. The only way out of this perplexing predicament is simple acknowledgement that there are aspects of reality we can only point to. What we have left is, indeed, silence.

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